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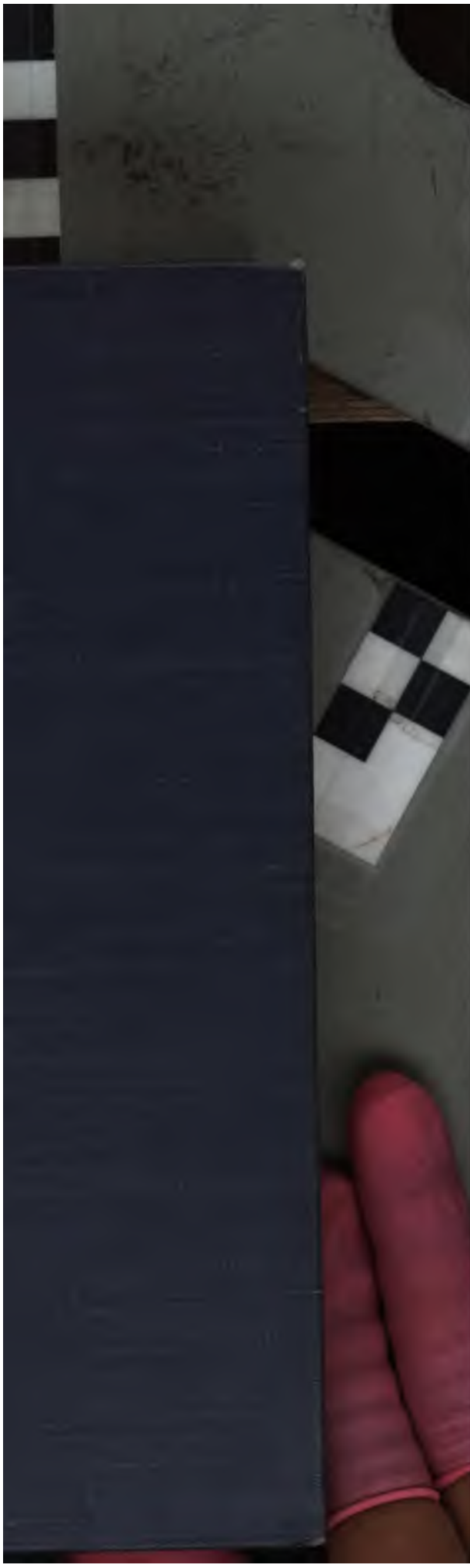

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THE WORKS OF

THÉOPHILE GAUTIER

IN TWENTY-FOUR VOLUMES

LIMITED EDITION

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THE WORKS OF

THÉOPHILE GAUTIER

VOLUME EIGHTEEN

TRANSLATED AND EDITED BY
PROFESSOR F. C. DE SUMICHRAST
Department of French, Harvard University

CAPTAIN FRACASSE

PART TWO

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"He was right: the bravo suddenly sank to the ground as if he had fallen on his face, and the baron saw no opponent in front of him, but a lightning stroke, cutting in with a hiss, flashed so swift towards him that he had just time to parry with a circular half-parade that broke Lampourde's sword clean in two pieces" *Frontispiece*

"'Good-luck to you, Master Herod,—it is long since you have put up at *The French Arms*'" *Page* 8

"Moved beyond all expression by Isabella's genuine love, Baron de Sigognac put his arm round her waist, drew her unresistingly to his breast, and touched with his lips the girl's forehead, whose panting bosom he felt close to his" . " 144

"The individual thus summoned rose slowly and sleepily, sat up, stretched out his long arms that reached nearly to the walls on either side, opened a huge mouth filled with sharp fangs, and yawned mightily, like a weary lion, uttering at the same time a number of inarticulate guttural sounds" . . . . . " 245

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Captain Fracasse

I

VIII

COMPLICATIONS ARISE

THE day after the performance Bellombre drew Blazius to one side, and, undoing the strings of a long leather purse, poured out, as from a cornucopia, one hundred shining pistoles which he set up in piles, to the great admiration of the Pedant, who gazed upon the outspread treasure, his eyes shining with covetousness of the gold.

With a splendid gesture Bellombre gathered up the pistoles at one swoop and planted them in his friend's hand.

"You readily understood," he said, "that I did not make such a display of coin merely for the purpose of tantalising you and exasperating your desires. Pocket the cash without any scruples; I make you a present

of it; or, if your pride rebels at the idea of accepting a gift from your old comrade, call it a loan. Money is the sinews of war, love, and the drama. Besides, these coins, having been made round so that they might roll, are getting tired of remaining flat in the recesses of this purse, where, in time, they would grow rusty and become covered with cobwebs and fungi. Here I spend nothing, for I live in rustic fashion, fed by Mother Earth, the great nurse of mankind. Therefore I shall not feel the need of the money."

Having no reply ready in answer to this rhetoric, Blazius pocketed the pistoles and cordially embraced Bellombre. His vinous eye shone brighter than usual between his winking lids; the light flashed on a tear, and the efforts the old actor was making to keep back this pearl of gratitude caused his bushy eyebrows to move in the most comical way. Sometimes they went up to the middle of his forehead amid waves of close-set wrinkles, and sometimes they drooped so low as almost to obscure his glance. These manœuvres of his, however, did not prevent the tear from slipping out and rolling down his nose warmed up to a cherry colour by the libations of the previous night, and evaporating upon the nostril.

COMPLICATIONS ARISE

It was plain that the ill-luck that had hitherto attended the company had ceased to pursue them. The profits of the performance, added to Bellombre's pistoles, formed a very handsome sum, a certain amount of coin being found mixed up with the provisions, and the car of Thespis, recently so bare of food, was now well stocked. In order not to do things by halves, Bellombre lent the players a pair of strong plough-horses, neatly harnessed, with painted collars adorned with bells that tintinnabulated most pleasantly as the stout animals plodded along.

So the comedians, refreshed and happy, made their entry into Poictiers, not, to be sure, as pompously as did Alexander into Babylon, but quite majestically for all that. The lad who was to take the horses back walked at their head and moderated their pace, for they smelt from afar the warm odour of the stables. As they drove through the tortuous streets of the town, the wheels rumbled over the rough pavement and the iron-work clanked merrily, drawing the people to their windows and to the door of the inn, where, by way of calling for the gate, the driver cracked his whip, breaking out into such a joyous volley that his horses started suddenly and set all their bells tinkling and chiming.

This was very different from the humble, piteous, and furtive fashion in which the actors had, not so long since, approached the most wretched of pot-houses; and the landlord of "The French Arms" easily understood from the noise that the new-comers had money in their pockets, and consequently hastened in person to open wide the two leaves of the carriage-gate.

"The French Arms" hostel was the finest inn in Poictiers, that patronised by rich and well-born travellers. The court into which the chariot entered looked quite fine; it was surrounded by clean-looking buildings, with a covered balcony or external passage supported upon iron brackets running right round; a convenient arrangement which facilitated the waiting upon guests and gave ready access to the rooms, every one of which looked out on the court. At the back of the court there opened out an archway through which the offices, kitchens, stables, and sheds were reached.

Over all reigned an air of prosperity. The walls, recently repointed, were bright to the eye, and there was not a speck of dust upon the woodwork of the stairs and the balustrades of the balconies. The new bright red tiles, the flutings of which still held a few

traces of snow, shone cheerfully in the winter sunshine, and from the chimney-tops rose spirals of smoke that promised good cheer. At the foot of the steps, cap in hand, stood the innkeeper, a most corpulent fellow, whose triple chin spoke eloquently of the excellence of his cooking, while the superiority of his cellar was attested by the superb purple colour of his face, which seemed to have been rubbed with blackberries, like the features of Silenus, Bacchus' kindly drunken preceptor. A smile spreading from ear to ear caused his fat cheeks to puff out and nearly concealed his cunning eyes, marked at the outer corners with crows' feet of facetious wrinkles. He was, indeed, so blooming, so plump, so rosy, so appetising, so well-kept that he inspired the desire to spit him and eat him with his own gravy for a sauce.

On seeing the Tyrant, whom he knew of old and who, he was aware, was good pay, his delight was markedly increased, for actors attract customers and the young fellows in society spend money on collations, suppers, and other entertainments in order to win the good graces of the ladies by treating them to delicacies, choice wines, sweets, preserves, and similar good things.

"Good luck to you, Master Herod," said he. "It is long since you have put up at 'The French Arms.'"

"That is true," returned the Tyrant, "but it does not do to go on performing our nonsense in the same place too long. The spectators learn all our tricks and could perform them themselves. A little absence is a good thing; what has been forgotten is as good as new. Are there many members of the nobility in Poictiers just now?"

"Numbers of them, Master Herod; the hunting season is over and they are at a loss for entertainments, for even eating and drinking are apt to pall. You will have crowded houses."

"In that case," said the Tyrant, "bring the keys of seven or eight rooms, take three or four capons from the spit, bring out a dozen bottles of that good old wine you wot of, and spread through the town the report that the illustrious company of his lordship Herod has put up at 'The French Arms,' that it has a stock of new plays and intends to give several performances."

While the Tyrant and the innkeeper were thus talking, the players had got out of the chariot; the servants took their luggage and carried it to the rooms that had

"Good-luck to you Master Herod[illegible] put up at 'The French Arms.'"

been assigned each of them. Isabella's happened to be somewhat apart from the others, the nearer ones being engaged. This in no wise displeased the young lady, whose modesty was not infrequently jarred by the Bohemian-like promiscuity entailed by the wandering life of strolling players.

Thanks to the chatter of host Bilot, the whole town speedily was made aware that a company of actors had arrived, and would present the plays of the finest wits of the day as well as, if not better than, the Paris troupe. The bucks and blades inquired whether the actresses were handsome, and curled up their mustaches with an air of easy conquest and self-satisfaction most ridiculous to behold. Bilot replied, with an accompaniment of significant grimaces, in a discreet and mysterious fashion that was well calculated to turn the heads and to pique the curiosity of these young calves.

Isabella had her clothes placed upon the trays in the wardrobe which, with a valanced bed, a table with twisted legs, two arm-chairs and a wooden coffer, composed the furniture of her room; then she proceeded to pay that attention to her toilet which is indispensable in the case of a refined young lady, careful of her appearance, after a long trip in the company of men. She

undid her long hair, finer than silk, brushed it, combed it, poured upon it a few drops of essence scented with bergamot, and fastened it up again with bows of narrow blue ribbon, a colour that well became her blush-rose complexion. Next she changed her linen, and any one who might have caught sight of her then would have believed he beheld one of Diana's nymphs preparing, after having thrown off her garments, to step into a pool in some wooded vale of Hellas. But it was merely a flash, for over her fair nudity suddenly fell a jealous mist of linen; Isabella was chaste and modest even when alone. Next she put on a gray gown trimmed with blue, and looking at herself in the mirror she smiled, with that smile which the least coquettish of women bestows upon herself when she is satisfied with her appearance.

The snow had melted under the influence of the higher temperature, and, save on places looking to the north, there was no trace of it left. The sun was shining, and Isabella could not resist the temptation to open the window and put her pretty face out to enjoy the view from her room; an innocent fancy enough, since the window opened upon a lonely lane, closed in on one side by the inn itself and on the

other by a long garden wall over which rose the tops of leafless trees. She could look into the garden and note the pattern of a bed outlined with scroll-work formed of box plants. At the end of the garden rose a mansion whose blackened walls betokened its age.

Two gentlemen were walking in the garden by the side of a high hedge. They were both young and handsome, but of unequal rank, as was proved by the deference the one paid to the other, keeping a little behind him and giving him the crown of the walk every time they had to retrace their steps. Of this friendly couple the former was Orestes and the latter Pylades. Orestes, as I shall call him until I have learned his real name, was about twenty or twenty-two; his complexion was pale, and his hair very black. A doublet of tan-coloured velvet set off his handsome figure; a short cloak, of the same stuff and the same colour as the doublet, and trimmed with three rows of gold lace, hung from his shoulder and was fastened by a cord the knots of which fell down upon his breast. He wore boots of soft white Russia leather, and his feet were so small that many a woman would have envied their size and their high-arched instep, set off to greater advantage by the high boot-heels. The easy boldness of his motions

and the proud security of his mien proved him to be a lord of high degree who was sure of being welcome everywhere, and before whom life opened free from difficulties. Pylades, red-haired and red-bearded, and dressed in black from head to foot, was far from displaying, good-looking though he was, the same triumphant assurance.

"I tell you, my dear fellow, that I am sick of Corisande," said Orestes as they turned back at the top of the walk and continued a conversation begun before Isabella opened her window. "I have ordered my porter not to admit her, and I am going to send her back her portrait, which is as unpleasant to me as her own self, together with her letters that weary me equally as much as her conversation."

"Yet Corisande loves you," remarked Pylades timidly.

"What do I care for that so long as I do not love her?" replied Orestes hotly. "It has nothing to do with the matter. Am I to be charitable enough to love all the wenches and silly females that fall in love with me? I am too kind-hearted as it is. I allow myself to be fooled by their tearful looks, their sobs, sighs, and lamentations, and I let myself be caught at last while inwardly cursing my lack of spirit and my tenderness

of feeling. Henceforth I shall be the coldest of the cold, icy as Hippolytus and an avoider of women like Joseph. It will take a clever Potiphar to get her hands on the edge of my cloak. I declare myself henceforth a misogynist, a foe to petticoats, whether they be of camlet or taffeta. I will have no more to do with duchesses, courtesans, citizens' wives, or shepherd girls, for who deals with women lays up for himself troubles, disappointments, and unpleasant adventures. I hate them from the crown of their heads to the soles of their feet, and I shall intrench myself in chastity as a monk in his cowl. That accursed Corisande has for ever disgusted me with her sex. I will have nothing more to do with it in the future."

Orestes had got thus far in his discourse when, looking up as if to call Heaven to witness his vow, he chanced to catch sight of Isabella at her window. Nudging his companion, he said to him: —

"Note at yonder window, blooming like Aurora on her balcony in the East, that adorable and lovely creature, more like a goddess than a mortal, with her light-brown hair, her pure face, and her gentle eyes. How well she looks, thus leaning on her arms and bending somewhat forward, showing to advantage, under the

gauze of her chemisette, her rounded ivory breasts. I dare swear that she is most sweet-tempered and in no wise resembles other women. She is assuredly modest, amiable, and cultured, and charming and agreeable in her intercourse."

"By Jupiter!" said Pylades, laughing, "you must have uncommonly good sight to see all that from here. For my own part all I can make out is a woman at a window. She is not bad, no doubt, but I fancy she is not endowed with the incomparable perfections you have bestowed upon her so liberally."

"Oh! I am over head and ears in love with her already. I am madly in love with her, and have her I must, even if I have to make use of my most subtle inventions, to empty my coffers, and run a hundred rivals through the body."

"Come, come; do not get so hot over it; you might catch a pleurisy," said Pylades. "But what has become of that fine hatred of the sex you were boasting of but now? The first glimpse of a pretty face has been sufficient to dispel it."

"When I stormed and raved as I did, I was not aware of the existence of that angel of beauty, and all I uttered was but damnable blasphemy, rank heresy,

and downright wickedness, which I pray Venus, goddess of love, to forgive me."

"She will forgive you, no doubt, for she is very indulgent towards mad-brained lovers, among whom you deserve to be the standard-bearer."

"I shall proceed to open the campaign," said Orestes, "and courteously declare war upon my beautiful foe."

So saying, he stopped, stared straight at Isabella, took off his hat in gallant and respectful fashion, swept the ground with the plume, and blew a kiss in the direction of the window.

The young actress, who perceived his action, assumed a calm and collected expression, to make the insolent fellow understand that he had made a mistake, closed the window, and drew down the blind.

"Aurora is hidden behind a cloud," said Pylades. "That does not augur well for the rest of the day."

"On the contrary, I consider my beauty's retreat a favourable sign. When a soldier withdraws behind the crenellations of the tower, it means that the assailant's arrow has gone home. She is winged, I tell you, and the kiss I blew to her will compel her to think of me all night, if for no other purpose than to call me

names and charge me with being a bold, bad man, a fault which ladies are inclined to look leniently upon. There is now something between the fair unknown and me; a very slender thread, I grant, but that I shall strengthen until I have made it into a rope whereby I shall climb up to my lady's bower."

"You are uncommonly well up in all the stratagems and theories of love," put in Pylades respectfully.

"I occasionally pique myself on it," returned Orestes. "And now let us go in; my timid fair will not put in an appearance again for some time. This evening I shall set my scouts at work."

The two friends slowly ascended the steps to the old mansion and disappeared. Now let me return to my players.

Not far from the inn stood a tennis-court, admirably adapted to the purposes of a play-house. The actors hired it, and a master carpenter in the town speedily fitted it for its new destination under the direction of the Tyrant. A glazier and house-painter, who undertook to daub signs and to paint coats of arms upon carriage panels, touched up the worn and discoloured scenery and even painted a new set not unskilfully. The dressing-room used by the tennis-players was

turned into a green-room for the company, screens being placed round the actresses' toilet-tables and forming small dressing-rooms. Every reserved seat had been taken beforehand, and there was every prospect of a paying house.

"What a pity," said the Tyrant to Blazius, as they ran over the plays that they proposed to give, "what a pity that Zerbina has left us. A soubrette is in truth the salt, *mica salis*, and the spice of a comedy. Her sparkling gayety illumines the play; she enlivens the parts that would otherwise prove slow; and she compels laughter even from the unwilling by the mere exhibition of her pretty gleaming teeth between her ruby lips. Her chatter, her sauciness, her lasciviousness form a pleasant contrast with the modest affectation, the soft speech, and the cooing of the leading lady. The bright colours of her audacious dress tickle the eye, and she can show her shapely leg and her red stockings clocked with gold, up to the knee or almost up to it, for that is a sight both young and old men delight in; especially the old, whose dormant salaciousness it awakens."

"Undoubtedly," replied Blazius, "a soubrette is a precious condiment, a spice-box that gives a relish to

the sickly comedies of the day. But we must perforce do without one, for neither Isabella nor Serafina can play the part, and besides we need them for the parts of leading lady and maiden in love. The devil fly away with that Marquis of Bruyères who has robbed us of the pearl, the phœnix and paragon of maids in the person of the incomparable Zerbina!"

The two actors had got so far in their conversation when the silvery tinkling of bells was heard at the entrance to the inn. Soon the quick cadence of hoofs sounded upon the pavement of the yard, and the two men, leaning over the balustrade of the gallery in which they were strolling up and down, saw three mules, harnessed in the Spanish fashion, with plumes on their heads, embroideries, tufts of wool, clusters of bells, and striped blankets, all very clean and handsome, and evidently not worn by hired animals.

The first was ridden by a hulking lackey, in gray livery, with a hunting-knife in his belt and an arquebuse across his saddle-bow, who looked insolent enough to be a lord, and who, had he been better dressed, might have passed for the master of the company. He led behind him, by a long strap twisted round his arm, the second mule, which carried two huge bundles balanced

on either side the pack-saddle and covered with a Valencian muestra cape.

The third mule, handsomer and more spirited than the other two, carried a young woman warmly wrapped up in a fur-lined cloak and wearing a gray felt hat with red plume, pulled well down over her face.

"Look here," said Blazius to the Tyrant, "does not that procession remind you of something? It seems to me that this is not the first time I have heard the tinkling of these bells."

"By Saint Alipantinus!" returned the Tyrant, "these are the very mules that carried off Zerbina at the carfax of the Cross. Speak of angels —"

"And you see their tails," interrupted Blazius. "O thrice and four times blessed day, to be marked with a white stone! It is Señora Zerbina herself. See her jump down from her steed, with that wanton movement of the hips that marks her out among all other women, and hand her cloak to the lackey. Now she is removing her hat and shaking out her hair as a bird fluffs its feathers. Let us go to meet her, and scoot down the steps four at a time."

Blazius and the Tyrant hastened down to the yard and met Zerbina at the foot of the steps. The

lively girl threw her arms round the Pedant's neck and catching hold of his head in her hands, —

"I must embrace you," she said, joining the action to the words, "and kiss your ugly old face as heartily as if you were a handsome young fellow, so glad am I to see you again. Don't be jealous, Herod, and don't frown as if you were about to order the massacre of the Innocents. I shall kiss you too; I began with Blazius because he is uglier than you."

Zerbina faithfully fulfilled her promise, for she was a woman of her word and honest in her own way. Giving a hand to each of the actors, she ascended to the gallery, where Master Bilot had a room made ready for her. She had scarcely entered when she threw herself into an arm-chair and breathed loud, like a person relieved of a burden.

"You cannot imagine how glad I am to be with you again," said she to the two men after a moment of silence. "But do not fancy that it is because I am in love with your old snouts damaged by powder and rouge. Thank Heaven! I am in love with no one. I am glad because I am back in my own element, and one is always uncomfortable out of it. Water is not the thing for birds any more than air is for fishes;

birds drown in the one and fishes suffocate in the other. I am a born actress and the stage is the only place I can breathe in. On the stage only do I really live; the smell of the candles is sweeter to me than the scent of civet, benzoin, ambergris, musk, and perfumed skins. The odour of the wings is more delightful than balm to me. Sunshine bores me and the realities of life weary me. I need imaginary loves to serve, and the world of romantic adventures in plays to satisfy my active disposition. Since poets have ceased to lend me their voices, I seem to have become dumb; so I have returned to take my parts up again. I hope you have not engaged any one in my place; not that any one could possibly take that place of mine, but if you have, I shall scratch the wretch's face and break her front teeth right in front of the footlights. I can be the very devil when any one trenches upon my privileges."

"There will be no need of your indulging in such carnage," said the Tyrant. "We have no soubrette. Dame Leonardo took your parts, playing them old and adapted to her rank of duenna; a pretty solemn and unpleasant change, to which we were driven by necessity. If you had possessed one of the magical unguents of which Apuleius speaks, and had transformed

yourself into a bird and perched upon the edge of the roof a moment ago, you would have heard our conversation and enjoyed a sensation most novel to the absent — your praises sung on a lyric, Pindaric, and dithyrambic mode."

"That 's right," answered Zerbina. "I see that you are still my good old comrades and that sprightly Zerbina was missed."

The servants entered and brought in packages, boxes, and valises, which the actress checked, and opened by means of a number of small keys, hung on a silver ring, in presence of the two men.

They contained handsome clothes, fine linen, guipures, lace, pieces of velvet and of China satins. There was also a long, wide, heavy leather bag, stuffed full of money, the strings of which Zerbina undid, pouring the gold out on the table, so that the flow was like that of Pactolus coined and minted. She plunged her little brown hands into the golden heap, as a winnower in a heap of corn, picked up as much as she could hold in her two hands, then opened them and allowed the money to fall in a shower more brilliant and heavier than that which proved the undoing of Danaë, the daughter of Acrisius, in her brazen tower.

Zerbina's eyes sparkled as brightly as did the gold pieces, her nostrils were dilated, and nervous laughter caused her white teeth to show.

"Serafina would burst with spite did she see me handling so much money," said she to Herod and Blazius. "I show it to you in order that you may know it is not want that has brought me back to the fold, but sheer love of my art. Now, my old friends, if you are strapped for ready rhino, help yourselves freely and even a little more than freely."

The players thanked her for her generosity, and told her they were in no present need.

"Never mind, then," returned Zerbina. "Some other time you may want cash, and I shall keep it for you in my box like a faithful treasurer."

"So it is you who have forsaken the poor Marquis," said Blazius, with an air of contrition; "for you are not the sort of woman that is forsaken. It is the part of Circe, and not that of Ariadne, you play. Yet he was a splendid nobleman, of handsome figure, with the Court air about him, clever, and in every respect worthy of being loved rather longer."

"My intention is to keep him as I would keep a ring on my finger and the most precious gem in my

jewel-box," answered Zerbina. "I have by no means forsaken him, and I have only run away to make him come after me."

"*Fugax sequax, sequax fugax*," returned the Pedant. "These four Latin words, with their cabalistic consonance that recalls the croaking of the frogs in the comedy of that name by Master Aristophanes, the Athenian poet, contain in themselves the very marrow of the theory of love, and might serve as a rule of life for the male as well as for the female sex."

"What does that Latin of yours mean, you old Pedant?" asked Zerbina. "You have omitted to translate it into French, forgetting that we have not all been, like you, schoolmasters and dispensers of thrashings."

"It may be translated," returned Blazius, "into a couple of lines or versicles somewhat as follows: —

"'If you would be followed, away with you;
If you should follow, it is away with you.'"

"That," said Zerbina, breaking out into laughter, "is downright caramel and cracker poetry. I am sure it can be sung as a round."

Whereupon the madcap girl began singing the Pedant's verses at the top of her voice, in so clear, so

silvery and so pearly a voice that it was delightful to listen to her. She accompanied her song with such expressive faces, sometimes smiling, sometimes frowning, that one could have sworn two lovers were, the one running away, the other pursuing, the one hot, the other cold.

When she had satisfied her roguish humour, she quieted down and became serious once more.

"Listen to my tale," said she. "The Marquis had sent his lackey and his muleteer to meet me at the carfax of the Cross and take me thence to a lodge or hunting-box in one of his forests. It is very solitary and exceedingly difficult to come upon, if one does not know of its existence, for it is concealed by a dark fir wood. It is there that his lordship indulges in debauches with a number of boon companions. They can shout 'Drink deep!' and 'No heel-taps!' without being heard by any one save an aged servitor whose business it is to replenish the flagons. It is also the retreat devoted to his loves and gallantries. It contains a very nice apartment hung with Flanders pastoral tapestries, and furnished with an old-fashioned, but wide, soft, comfortable bed, with plenty of pillows and curtains; a dressing-table provided with everything

a woman can possibly require, even were she a duchess: combs, sponges, bottles of scents, opiates, boxes of patches, pomade for the lips, almond paste; also arm-chairs, chairs, and stools admirably upholstered, and a Turkish carpet so thick that you can tumble about anywhere upon it without hurting yourself. This mysterious retreat is on the second story. I call it mysterious because from outside no one could guess at its splendour. The walls have been darkened by time, and they look as though they would fall but for a great ivy that clings to and supports them. If you were to pass the place, you would believe it to be uninhabited. At night, the shutters and window curtains prevent the light of the fire and the tapers from being seen outside."

"That would make a fine setting for the fifth act of a tragi-comedy," said the Tyrant. "It would be just the place for a duel to the death."

"You are so much in the habit of playing tragic parts," answered Zerbina, "that you are always thinking of horrors. The place is, on the contrary a very bright one, for the Marquis is anything but bloodthirsty."

"Go on with your story, Zerbina," said Blazius, with a gesture of impatience.

COMPLICATIONS ARISE

"On approaching that wild place," continued the girl, "I could not repress a slight sensation of fear, not for my virtue, but it did occur to me that the Marquis intended to shut me up in a sort of oubliette, from which I should emerge only at such times as it suited his fancy. I have not the smallest taste for dungeons with grated windows, and I would not put up with captivity, even to become the favourite sultana of His Highness the Grand Seignior. I reflected, however, that my profession is that of soubrette, and that in the course of my life I had helped so many Isabellas, Leonoras and Doralises to escape, that I would be sure of devising some means of escaping myself, in the event, of course, of the Marquis desiring to detain me against my will. A pretty thing indeed it would have been if a jealous man could make a prisoner of Zerbina! So I entered the place bravely, and I was most pleasantly surprised on finding that this lodging, which frowns upon passers-by, smiled upon the guests within. It was ruinous outside, but luxurious inside. A bright fire blazed on the hearth; rose-coloured wax tapers were reflected in the mirror-backs of the sconces, while on the table, graced with a wealth of glass, silver-plate, and flagons, was laid a supper as abundant as it

was delicate. Pieces of rich stuffs, carelessly thrown upon the side of the bed, reflected the light from their folds, and on the dressing-table gems, bracelets, necklaces and ear-rings flashed and sparkled in their golden settings. I felt quite reassured. A young peasant girl drew the portière aside and offered to assist me. She removed my travelling-dress and helped me to put on one more suitable, that hung ready for me in the wardrobe. The Marquis was not long in making his appearance. He declared I looked fascinating in my taffeta wrapper trimmed with white and cerise, and swore that he really and truly loved me to madness. We sat down to supper, and although I do violence to my modesty in saying so, I must perforce own that I talked brilliantly. I seemed to have the devil's own wit; I flashed out clever things, and hit upon the brightest repartees, laughing the while in most bewitching fashion. I cannot give you any idea of the go, the dash, and the joyous swing of it all. It was enough to make the dead get up and dance and the ashes of old King Priam flame up again. The Marquis, dazzled, fascinated, intoxicated, called me alternately angel and demon; he proposed killing his wife and marrying me. The dear man would have done it too, but I would not

hear of it, objecting that that kind of thing was decidedly stale, middle-class, and commonplace. I do not believe that Lais, the beautiful Imperia, or Mistress Vanozza, who was a Pope's paramour, ever made a supper go off so stunningly.

"I kept it up in this way for several days, but little by little the Marquis became thoughtful, seeming to miss something he could not define, but that he felt the want of. He rode out several times, and even invited two or three friends by way of diversion. Knowing his vanity, I dressed in a way to set off my looks to the best advantage, and I multiplied my graces, my airs, and my coquetries for the benefit of these country bumpkins, who had never seen anything to match me. At dessert, I made a pair of castanets out of the pieces of a broken china plate, and danced a saraband so madly, so lasciviously, so furiously that it would have caused a saint to commit a mortal sin. My arms were rounded above my head, my legs flashed in a whirlwind of skirts, my hips were livelier than quicksilver; I bent backwards until I could almost touch the floor with my shoulders, I let my breasts swell up and out freely, and flavoured the whole performance with smiles and glances that would drive a

whole audience crazy if I ever dared dance in that way upon the stage. The Marquis beamed with satisfaction, feeling proud as a king at possessing such a mistress as I; but, all the same, the next day he was dull, languid, and disinclined to do anything. I tried my strongest philters upon him, but alas! they had lost their power. This state of things appeared to surprise him; he looked at me sometimes as if he were striving to recognise some one else in me. Can he have taken me, I asked myself, to personify his remembrance of some one else, and did I recall some lost love to him? No, I answered; such melancholy fancifulness does not consort with his character. Empty dreams of that kind may suit bilious hypochondriacs, but not a high-liver with rosy gills and ruddy complexion."

"Was it not satiety?" asked Blazius. "For ambrosia itself ends by palling on the taste, and the gods descend upon earth to taste the coarse bread of men."

"Learn, you stupid fellow," retorted Zerbina, administering a little tap on the Pedant's hand, "that one can never tire of me. You said so yourself just now."

"Forgive me, Zerbina, and tell us the cause of the Marquis's tantrums. I long to know it."

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"Well," went on the maid, "by dint of turning the matter over I managed to understand what was the trouble that spoiled the Marquis's happiness, and I discovered which was the crumpled rose-leaf that made this Sybarite of mine sigh on his voluptuous couch. He possessed the woman, but he longed for the actress. The brilliant aspect we have under the blaze of the lights, and to which rouge and powder, dresses and costumes, the diversity and the action of our parts contribute, had vanished like the empty splendour of the stage when the lamp-man blows out the candles. By leaving the boards I had, so far as he was concerned, lost a portion of my attraction. He had Zerbina only; and it was Lisette, Marton, Marinette, he had fallen in love with; the flashing glance and the quick smile, the prompt repartee, the saucy look, the fanciful dress, the admiration and the desire of the public. He was trying to make out my stage face under my society features; for we actresses, unless we happen to be ugly, possess two different forms of beauty, the one made up, the other natural: a mask and a face. And pretty as the face may be, it is the mask that men often prefer. What the Marquis wanted was the soubrette he had seen in 'The Rodomontades of Captain Hector,'

while he found her but partially in me. The caprice that binds certain noblemen to actresses is far less sensual than is generally believed; it is the talent rather than the body that attracts them. They hope to grasp the ideal when clasping the real in their arms, but the image they pursue escapes from them. An actress is like a painting that must be looked at from a distance and in the right light. If one draws too near, the charm is dispelled. I too was beginning to feel bored. I had very often wished to be loved by a nobleman, to have rich dresses, to enjoy without care the refinements and pleasures of luxury, and I had often cursed the hard fate that compelled me, in the course of my life of wandering player, to wander from town to village and village to town in a waggon, melting in summer, freezing in winter. I kept watching for an opportunity to get away from that wretched existence, never suspecting that it was the very thing I was best fitted for, that it was the reason of my being, my talent, my poetry, my charm, and my particular attraction. But for that beam of art which gilds me somewhat, I should be no more then a vulgar strumpet like other women. Thalia, the virgin goddess, protects me by making me wear her livery, and the lines of the poets, coals of living fire,

cleanse my lips, as they touch them, of many a lascivious and mincing kiss.

"So it was that I understood my worthy nobleman was in love, not with my eyes, my teeth, and my skin only, but even more with that little spark which shines in me and wins me applause. Therefore, one fine morning I told him plainly that I meant to go free again, as it did not in the least suit me to remain for ever a nobleman's mistress; that any other woman might do it, and that he had best gracefully grant me leave to depart. I added, of course, that I loved him very tenderly, and that I was deeply grateful to him for all his kindness. At first he was surprised, but not annoyed, and after thinking for a few moments, he said, 'What are you going to do, my pet?' To which I answered that I meant to catch up the company or join it in Paris, if it had already reached the capital. 'I mean to resume my soubrette's parts,' I said, 'for it is ever so long since I have taken in old fools.' Whereat he laughed. 'Well, off with you!' he said. 'Go on ahead with the train of mules, which I place at your service; I shall follow you soon. Some business I have neglected requires my presence at Court, and I have been so long in the country that I am growing

rusty. You must allow me to come and applaud you, and I hope that if I come to knock at the door of your dressing-room, I may be permitted to enter.' I assumed a dear little look of modesty not at all calculated to drive him to despair, as I returned, 'Oh! Marquis, what a thing to ask!' To cut a long story short, after taking most tender leave of him, I jumped upon my mule, and here I am in 'The French Arms.'"

"But," said Herod, with a shade of anxiety, "suppose your Marquis should not turn up, you would be terribly disappointed."

The notion struck Zerbina as so utterly comical that she lay back in her arm-chair and laughed loud and long, holding her sides.

"The Marquis not turn up!" she cried when she had somewhat regained her composure. "Why, you may engage his room beforehand. My only fear was that his ardour might have brought him here before me. So, so, you Tyrant as stupid as you are cruel, you doubt the power of my charms? It is plain that your tragedies are deadening your reason; you used to be brighter in the old days."

Leander and Scappino, who had learned from the servants of Zerbina's arrival, now entered and paid

her their compliments. Soon after came in dame Leonardo, whose owl eyes flashed at the sight of the gold and gems spread out upon the table. She behaved towards Zerbina with the most sickening obsequiousness. Isabella also made her appearance, and Zerbina graciously presented her with a piece of taffeta. Serafina alone remained shut up in her room, her self-love not having forgiven the maid for the inexplicable preference the Marquis had shown the latter.

Zerbina was told of the freezing to death of Captain Hector on the road, and of his place having been taken by Baron de Sigognac, who had adopted for a stage name the very appropriate title of Captain Fracasse.

"It will be a great honour for me to play with a nobleman whose ancestors went to the Crusades," said Zerbina, "and I hope respect will not kill my spirit. It is lucky that I am used now to men of rank."

Just then Sigognac entered. Zerbina bent in a way to make her skirts balloon well out, and performed a court curtsey of the most ceremonious and correct order.

"This," she said, "is for his lordship, Baron de Sigognac, and this for my comrade Captain Fracasse,"

kissing him at the same time very promptly first on one cheek and then on the other, in a way to discompose Sigognac, who was not yet used to such stage liberties, and who, besides, was upset by Isabella's presence.

Zerbina's return enabled the repertory to be varied in pleasant fashion, and the whole company, save Serafina, was delighted to have her back.

And now that she is comfortably installed in her room, with her jolly companions around her, let me hark back to Orestes and Pylades, whom I left returning into the mansion after their walk in the garden.

Orestes, or, properly speaking, the young Duke de Vallombreuse, for such was his title, trifled with his food and more than once left untasted the glass that the lackey had filled, so deeply was he preoccupied with the thought of the lovely creature he had seen at the window. His confidant, the Chevalier de Vidalinc, tried in vain to divert him; Vallombreuse replied only by monosyllables to the friendly pleasantries of his Pylades.

As soon as the dessert had been cleared away, the Chevalier said to the Duke: —

"Short-lived fancies are the safest, and the best way

of getting that beauty out of your mind, is to secure possession of her. She will speedily be in the same case as Corisande. You are just like those sportsmen who care only for the tracking and killing of the game, and let it lie once they have brought it down. I shall start on a beating expedition, to drive the bird into your net."

"No," returned Vallombreuse, "I shall go myself; for, as you have truly said, I would follow up to the ends of the world the smallest game, whether fur or feather, no matter how often checked and even at the cost of dying of fatigue. Do not deprive me of that pleasure. I do really believe that if I were fortunate enough to come upon a woman that would resist me, I should fall down and worship her, but there is none such upon this earth."

"But for the fact that your successes are well known," said Vidalinc, "you might be taxed with conceit for speaking in such fashion, but your boxes filled with love-letters, portraits, love-knots, withered flowers, locks of black, golden, and auburn hair, and other proofs of love, prove that you are modest enough even when you speak as now. It may be that you will have your wish this time, for the lady at the

window struck me as being marvellously well-behaved, cold, and modest."

"Well, we shall see. Master Bilot is a willing talker, but he is also a good listener and knows the story of every one who puts up at his inn. Let us go and drink a glass of Canary there. I shall manage to make him talk, and he shall inform us concerning this travelling infanta."

A few minutes later the two young men entered "The French Arms" and called for Master Bilot. The worthy Boniface, aware of the rank of his guests, showed them into a lower room, comfortably tapestried, and in the chimney-place of which blazed a bright, crackling fire. He took from the cellarer's hands the bottle gray with dust and covered with cobwebs, removed its wax hood with infinite precautions, extracted the close-fitting cork from the neck without shaking the contents of the bottle, and with a hand as steady as if it had been cast in bronze, poured a thread of liquor golden as the topaz into the spiral wine-glasses of Venetian glass held by the Duke and the Chevalier. While thus performing the duties of cup-bearer, Bilot affected a religious gravity; he looked like a priest of Bacchus performing the mysterious rites of the divine

bottle; all he needed was to be crowned with ivy or vine leaves. This ceremoniousness added to the value of the wine he served, but apart from that it was really very good and worthier of a royal table than of an inn.

He was about to withdraw, when Vallombreuse, with a mysterious wink, stopped him on the threshold.

"Master Bilot," said he, "take a glass from the dresser, and drink my health in a bumper of this wine."

The tone in which this was said did not allow of any refusal; besides, Bilot did not require to be pressed to aid a guest to consume the treasures in his cellar. He lifted his glass with a bow, and drank down the contents to the last drop. "Good wine," said he, with a clucking of the tongue. Then he remained standing, his hand resting on the edge of the table, his eyes fixed on the Duke, waiting to know what the latter wanted with him.

"Have you many guests in your inn?" asked Vallombreuse. "And what sort of people are they?"

Bilot was opening his lips to reply, when the young Duke anticipated his answer and went on: —

"But what is the use of beating about the bush with an old rascal like you. Who is the woman that occu-

pies the room which looks out on the lane opposite Vallombreuse House; the third window from the corner of the wall? Reply quickly, and you shall have a gold piece for every syllable."

"At that rate," said Bilot with a jolly laugh, "a man would have to be more than virtuous if he used the laconic style so greatly favoured by the ancients. Yet, as I am wholly devoted to your grace, I shall speak but a single word: Isabella."

"Isabella! A lovely and romantic name," said Vallombreuse. "But do not resort to Lacedemonian brevity; be prolix, and tell me in detail all you know about that charmer."

"I yield to your grace's orders," said Bilot, bowing. "My cellar, my kitchen, and my tongue are at your lordship's disposal. Isabella is an actress who belongs to the company of Master Herod, lodging for the nonce at the Hotel of 'The French Arms.'"

"An actress," said the young Duke, with an accent of disappointment. "I took her, thanks to her discreet and reserved manner, for a lady of rank or a rich citizen's wife rather than for a strolling player."

"The mistake is a natural one," went on Bilot. "The young lady has very good manners. She plays

the part of a bashful maiden on the stage and keeps to it when off the boards. Her virtue, though in great danger, for she is pretty, is untarnished and she might well wear the virgin's snood. No one better understands how to dismiss a suitor by icy politeness that leaves absolutely no room for hope."

"I like that," said Vallombreuse, "for there is nothing I hate so much as too ready victims, and strongholds that sound a parley and purpose to capitulate even before the storming has been ordered."

"It would take more than one assault to carry this particular citadel," said Bilot, "although you are a bold and brilliant captain little accustomed to meet with resistance; for it is guarded by the vigilant sentinel of a chaste love."

"So the modest Isabella has a lover!" cried the young Duke, in a tone of mingled triumph and annoyance; for if, on the one hand, he did not much believe in the virtue of women, on the other, he was annoyed to learn that he had a rival.

"I said 'love,' not 'lover'," went on the innkeeper, insisting respectfully, "which is not the same thing. Your grace is much too expert in matters amatory not to appreciate the difference, subtile though it may

appear to be. A woman who has had one lover is likely to have another, as the song says, but a woman in love cannot be overcome, or at least only with the greatest difficulty, for she already has what is offered her."

"You argue," said Vallombreuse, "as if you had studied the Courts of love and Petrarca's sonnets. I thought your learning was confined to sauces and wines. Now tell me who is the object of that platonic tenderness."

"A member of the company," returned Bilot, "who I am inclined to think, joined them through love, for he has not the looks of an ordinary comedian."

"Well," said the Chevalier de Vidalinc to his friend, "you have reason to be satisfied; here are unexpected obstacles cropping up. A virtuous actress is not to be met with every day, and your task is cut out for you. It will be a change from ladies of rank and courtesans."

"You are sure," continued the young Duke, following out the train of his thoughts, "that the chaste Isabella does not allow that young fop, whom I already detest from the bottom of my soul, to take any liberties with her?"

"It is plain that your Grace does not know her," returned Master Bilot. "She is an ermine that would die rather than stain her white fur. When she has to be kissed in the play, you can see her redden under the rouge and brush away the kiss with the back of her hand."

"Here is to the proud and stand-off beauty, who will not allow herself to be mastered!" cried the young Duke. "I shall master her in such good fashion that she will have to pace, amble, trot, gallop, and curvet as I please."

"You will get nothing in that way, my lord Duke, if I may make bold to say so," said the Boniface, bowing most humbly, as befitted a man of inferior position venturing to contradict a superior separated from him by so many rounds of the social ladder.

"I have a mind to send her, in a handsome chagreen case, ear-rings of large pearls, a gold necklace of many rows with jewelled clasps, and a bracelet in the shape of a serpent with two big balas rubies for the eyes."

"She would return all these fine things to you, and tell you that you had mistaken her for some one else. She is not self-seeking, like most women in her condition, and her eyes, for a wonder, considering her sex,

do not light up at the sight of sparkling jewellery. She looks upon diamonds in the finest settings as though they were no better than so many medlars laid on straw."

"A strange and curious specimen of the sex, by my faith," said the Duke de Vallombreuse, somewhat astonished. "No doubt she makes use of that show of virtue to induce that rascal to marry her, for I suppose he is well off. Women of that class are sometimes seized with the fancy of becoming the mothers of honest people and of sitting down at assemblies among reputable ladies, their eyes modestly cast down with the most demure look in the world."

"You had better marry her, then," said Vidaline, laughing, "seeing there is no better way. The title of duchess softens the hardest-hearted."

"Not so fast," returned Vallombreuse. "You are hurrying matters rather too much. First let us parley, and let me devise some stratagem which shall allow me to approach the beauty without frightening her away."

"That is easier than making her love you," put in Master Bilot. "There is to be a rehearsal in the tennis-court to-night of the play to be performed to-morrow. A number of theatre lovers in this city are to

be admitted, and all you have to do is to give your name to be at once admitted. Besides, I shall mention the matter to my friend Herod, who never says no to me. However, if I had anything to say in this matter, I should have suggested your addressing your vows to Mlle. Serafina, who is no less lovely than Isabella, and whose vanity would have been tickled to death at being singled out by you."

"It is Isabella I am smitten with," replied the Duke, in the dry tone he knew so well how to take and that put an end to any further remarks. "It is Isabella I am crazy about, and none else, Master Bilot."

Then putting his hand in his pocket, he threw carelessly on the table a string of gold pieces, adding: —

"Take the price of the bottle out of that, and keep the change."

The innkeeper picked up the coins with a smug look and slipped them one after another into his purse. The two noblemen rose, pulled their beavers well down over their eyes, threw the ends of their cloaks over one shoulder, and left the room. Vallombreuse walked several times up and down the street, looking up every time he passed under the particular window, but all in vain. Isabella, now on her guard, did not show her-

e had drawn her curtain close and the room
ve been thought empty. Tired of dancing at-
in a deserted lane in a very cool wind, a per-
e he was quite unused to, the Duke soon
of his vain expectations and retraced his steps
ansion, cursing the impertinent prudery of the
who dared to keep a young and handsome
n at arm's length. He even bestowed a kindly
upon poor Corisande, recently so disdained;
self-love whispered to him that all he needed
s to show himself and he would conquer as
s did Cæsar. As for the rival, if he proved
the way, he would get rid of him by means
bravoes or cut-throats, his own sense of dignity
g his measuring himself with a fellow of that

attack the young blade sword in hand, but he managed to restrain himself. There was nothing positively insulting in the mere fact of the Duke walking in the lane that would justify such aggression, and Sigognac would assuredly have laid himself open to the charge of acting in a foolish and ridiculous manner. Then the scandal it would have caused would have injured the reputation of Isabella, who was wholly unaware of the glances shot upwards invariably in the same place. Nevertheless, Sigognac promised to himself to keep his eye on the swain, whose features he imprinted in his memory in order to be sure to recognise him again in time of need.

For the next day's performance, which had been duly advertised by sound of drum through the whole town, Herod had chosen "Lygdamon and Lydias, or the Resemblance," a tragi-comedy by a certain George de Scudéry, gentleman, who, after having served in the French guards, had given up the sword for the pen and used the one as skilfully as the other. It was to be followed by "The Rodomontades of Captain Fracasse," in which Sigognac was to make his first appearance before a real public, having played as yet only before the calves, horned animals, and peasants in

Bellombre's barn. All the actors were very busy learning their parts ; Scudéry's play having been brought out but recently, they were not acquainted with it. Abstracted and sticking out their mouths like chattering monkeys, they walked up and down the gallery, sometimes muttering their lines, sometimes shouting them out. Any one seeing them thus engaged would have taken them for lunatics. They would stop short, then start again, striding along and whirling their arms about like the sails of windmills. Leander, in particular, having to play Lygdamon, was trying various attitudes, seeking effects and jumping about like a pea on a hot gridiron. He counted on his part to realise his dream of making some great lady fall in love with him and enable him to have his revenge for the thrashing he had received at the Castle of Bruyères, a thrashing that stuck in his gizzard long after its effects on his back had ceased to make themselves felt. His part, which was that of a bashful, sentimental lover, uttering fine sentiments at the feet of a cruel beauty in fairly well-turned lines, gave opportunities for lovelorn glances, sighs, palings of the face and all manner of moving affectations wherein mainly excelled Master Leander, one of the

leading lovers in the provinces, in spite of his pretensions and his ridiculous ways.

Sigognac, whom Blazius had undertaken to coach, had shut himself up in his room with the old comedian and was busy studying the difficult art of the actor. The type he represented was far removed from nature by its extravagantly exaggerated character, yet he had to make the truth felt through the exaggeration and to enable the man to be perceived under the oddity. Blazius was advising him to do this, and taught him to begin in a simple and truthful manner in order to break out into queer intonations, or again to resume his ordinary tone of voice after having screamed like a fowl that is being plucked alive; for no one, however affected, is constantly so. Besides, inequalities of this sort are the distinguishing trait of lunatics and crack-brained people, and mark their gestures also, these not agreeing with the meaning of the words, a discord from which a clever actor can draw comic effects. Blazius was of opinion that Sigognac should wear a half-mask, that is, one concealing the forehead and nose, in order to keep within the traditional figure, and to mingle the real with the fanciful in his face; which is of great advantage in such half-true, half-fanciful

oad caricatures of humanity which men do not with. In the hands of a vulgar actor, a part ort may well prove to be no more than a sorry buffoonery fit to please the rabble only and to well-bred people, but an actor of merit can e into it touches that hold the mirror up to better than if they were prearranged.

nac rather liked the notion of the half-mask, ecured his incognito, and gave him courage to crowd. The little bit of cardboard, it seemed would be like the lowered visor of a helm, which he could speak with a ghostly voice. face of man is the man himself; the body is ous, and a hidden face cannot be recognised. rangement conciliated the respect he owed to stors and the necessities of his situation. He

face wholly different from his real one. A turned-up nose, studded with warts and red as a cherry at the tip, eyebrows in the shape of circumflex accents, the ends curving up like commas, a mustache with pointed ends that curled upwards like the horns of the moon, made the features of the young Baron wholly unrecognisable. This mask, put on like a chamfron, covered the brow and nose only, but completely changed the aspect of the rest of the face.

They repaired to the rehearsal, which was to be in full dress, to get an idea of the general effect. In order not to have to go through the streets like a lot of masqueraders, the players had sent on their costumes to the tennis-court, and the ladies dressed in the room I have described. The people of quality, the young blades, and the wits of the place had striven with might and main to be allowed to enter within this temple, or sacristy rather, of Thalia, in which the priestesses of the Muse were putting on their apparel to celebrate the mysteries, and all crowded round the actresses. Some held hand-glasses for them; others placed the candles nearer so that they might have a better light; one man gave his opinion as to the place where a knot of ribbon should be put; another held the puff-box; a

third, more timid, remained seated on a coffer, swinging his legs, uttering no word and twisting his mustache by way of giving himself a countenance.

Each of the actresses had her own circle of courtiers whose greedy eyes sought opportunities of satisfying their desires in the chances and accidents of the toilet. Sometimes the wrapper, slipping away most timeously, allowed a glimpse of a back lustrous as marble; sometimes a swelling breast, rivalling the whiteness of snow or ivory, rebelled against the tyranny of the corset and had to be pressed back within its nest of lace, or else a handsome arm, raised to adjust the head-dress, was seen bare to the shoulder. There is no need to say how madrigals, compliments, and mythological commonplaces were drawn from the country bumpkins by the sight of such charms. Zerbina laughed loud and long as she listened to all their nonsense; Serafina, who was more conceited than she was clever, revelled in it, while Isabella paid no attention to it, and dressed in modest fashion under the gaze of the men, refusing politely but coldly the offers of service pressed upon her by the gallants.

Vallombreuse, followed by his friend Vidalinc, did not fail to make use of the opportunity to see Isabella.

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He thought she was even more lovely when seen close by than when beheld at a distance, and his passion increased all the more. The young Duke had bestowed particular pains upon his dress in view of the event, and as a matter of fact, he was remarkably handsome. He wore a splendid costume of white satin, with puffings and trimmings of cherry colour, and knots of ribbons of the same shade fastened with diamond drops. A mass of fine linen and lace emerged from the sleeves of his doublet; his sword hung from a rich silken scarf, and in his hand, encased in gloves scented with frangipani, he carried a white beaver with flame-coloured plume.

His long black hair, curled in small ringlets, framed in the perfect oval of his face and brought out its warm pallor. Under his small mustache his lips glowed like pomegranates, and his eyes flashed between their long, thick lashes. His neck, round and white like a pillar of marble, proudly supported his head and rose freely out of a priceless cravat of Venetian point lace.

Nevertheless there was something unpleasant in all this perfection. His clean, delicate, noble features were spoiled by an anti-human expression, if such an

be permissible. It was plain that the joys
ows of mankind had but little effect upon the
f that pitilessly handsome face. He evidently
ed, and in point of fact, did believe himself to
different species.

mbreuse stood quietly near Isabella's dressing-
sting his arm upon the frame of the mirror, in
manner that the actress's eyes, having to turn
nstantly, should be compelled to look at him.
clever move, fair enough in love, and that no
ould have proved successful in any other case.
nt to overwhelm her with his beauty of person,
d mien, and his splendid dress before he spoke

lla, who had recognised in him the bold youth
ane, and who was troubled by the imperious

COMPLICATIONS ARISE

"You play Sylvia, do you not, Miss, in M. de Scudéry's 'Lygdamon and Lydias'?"

"Yes, sir," answered Isabella, who could not avoid replying to so commonplace a question.

"It will never have been better played," went on Vallombreuse. "If it is a poor part, you will make it good, and if it be a good one, you will make it excellent. Happy the poets whose lines are spoken by lips such as yours!"

Such meaningless compliments were no more than the fair words which polite people are wont to address to actresses, and Isabella had perforce to accept them. She thanked the Duke with a very slight bow.

Sigognac, having, thanks to the assistance of Blazius, finished dressing in the small dressing-room of the tennis-court, now returned into the actresses' room to await the beginning of the performance. He was masked, and had already buckled on the belt of the long rapier, with the heavy shell-hilt and the cobweb, inherited from the unfortunate Hector. His scarlet cape, slashed on the edges, hung quaintly on his shoulders, the end cocked up by the end of the rapier. With the object of getting into the spirit of his part, he strode in, throwing the hip well forward, his legs as

far apart as the legs of a pair of dividers, and an insulting and provocative mien, as befitted a Captain Fracasse.

"You are really very well made up," said Isabella, as he drew near to pay her his compliments, "and never did Spanish Hector look more splendidly arrogant."

The Duke de Vallombreuse looked the new-comer, to whom the young actress spoke so sweetly, up and down with the most haughty disdain.

"Apparently this is the fellow with whom she is reported to be in love," said he to himself in bitterness of spirit, for he could not comprehend that any woman should hesitate for a moment to prefer the young and splendid Duke de Vallombreuse to so absurd a character.

He deliberately pretended, however, to ignore the presence of Sigognac, whom he looked upon as no more than a piece of furniture. So far as he was concerned, Sigognac was only a thing, and not a man, and the Duke behaved precisely as if he had been alone, gazing full upon Isabella with burning glances that rested upon the upper part of her breasts which showed through the opening of the chemisette.

Isabella, troubled by his stare, felt herself blushing, in spite of herself, under his fixed looks, that burned her like molten lead, and she hastened to complete her toilet in order to avoid them; urged on also by seeing Sigognac, plainly wrathy, clutching convulsively at the handle of his sword.

She placed a patch upon the corner of her lips, and made ready to rise and proceed to the stage, for the Tyrant had already bellowed several times: "Are you ready, ladies?"

"Allow me, Miss," said the Duke; "you have forgotten to put on a heart-breaker."

And dipping into the patch-box placed upon the dressing-table, Vallombreuse picked out a little black patch in the shape of a star.

"Permit me to put it on for you," he went on; "just here, near your bosom, the natural whiteness of which it will set off, and look like a real mole."

He joined the act to the words so swiftly that Isabella, startled, had barely time to throw herself back in her chair to avoid the insolent touch of his hand. The Duke, however, was not a man easily put out, and his finger, with the patch upon it, was just about to press the girl's bosom, when his arm

ized in an iron grasp that closed upon it like

Duke de Vallombreuse, mad with rage, looked
nd saw Captain Fracasse standing in an attitude
unlike that of a comedy poltroon.

y lord Duke," said Fracasse, still keeping hold
ombreuse's arm, "this young lady puts on her
herself, and needs no one's services."

ereupon he let go the arm of the young noble-
hose first impulse was to draw his sword. At
oment Vallombreuse, handsome as he was, ex-
a mien more grim and formidable than that of
herself. A dreadful pallor overspread his
; his black eyebrows were lowered over his
ot eyes; his red lips turned purple and were
with foam; and he breathed hard as if scenting

birth, and that he had nearly involved himself in a quarrel with a stroller. His aristocratic pride revolted at the thought. An insult from one of such low degree could not affect him. No man fights the mud that has splashed upon him. Nevertheless, as it was not in his nature to allow an offence to go unpunished, no matter whence it came, he approached Sigognac and said to him: —

"You scoundrel, I shall have you thrashed by my servants!"

"You had better beware of doing so, my lord Duke," said Sigognac very quietly and as if the matter did not concern him in the least. "You had better beware. My bones are hard, and the sticks of your fellows would smash like glass upon them. It is on the stage only that I allow myself to receive blows."

"Insolent though you are, you hound, I shall not do you the honour of thrashing you myself. Such ambition is far beyond your merits," returned Vallombreuse.

"We shall see about that, my lord Duke," replied Sigognac. "It may be that being less proud than you, I shall thrash you with my own hands."

"I do not reply to masked people," said the Duke, taking the arm of Vidalinc who had drawn near.

"You shall see my face, my lord, at the proper time and place, and I fancy you will like it less even than my false nose. But let that suffice. I hear the bell ringing, and I should run the risk of missing my cue if I delayed longer."

The players admired his courage, but, as they were aware of the Baron's rank, they were not as much surprised by it as the other witnesses to the scene, who were aghast at his audacity. Isabella had been so frightened that the powder had come off her face, and Zerbina, seeing how dreadfully pale she had become, had to rouge her up heavily. She could scarcely stand, and had not the maid supported her by the elbow she would have fallen flat on making her entrance upon the stage. Most unpleasant was it to sweet, good, and modest Isabella to be the subject of a quarrel, for she dreaded above all things attracting attention and exciting remark, well knowing that these are always hurtful to a woman's character. Besides, although quite determined not to yield to her passion, she loved Sigognac tenderly, and the idea of his being exposed to an ambush, or to a duel at the least,

pained her more than she would have cared to own.

In spite of the incident, the rehearsal was duly carried out, for players are not to be diverted from their fictitious passions by the emotions of real life. Isabella herself played particularly well, although her heart was full of care. Fracasse, excited by the quarrel, was simply brilliant, carrying everything before him. Zerbina surpassed herself; every one of her hits raised storms of laughter and prolonged applause. From the corner of the orchestra came applause that was heard before any other and lasted until all the rest had stopped; the enthusiastic persistence of it at last attracted Zerbina's attention. Under the pretence of by-play she stepped close up to the footlights, craned her neck forward like an inquisitive bird peering out between the leaves, looked into the auditorium and caught sight of the Marquis de Bruyères, crimson with satisfaction, and his eyes, flashing with desire, shining like carbuncles. He had come upon the Lisette, the Marton, and the Smeraldina of his dreams once more. He was in the seventh heaven of happiness.

"The Marquis is here," whispered Zerbina to Blazius, who was playing Pandolfo, between two

parts of their dialogue, in that mute voice which actors use on the stage to talk to each other when they do not wish to be heard by the public. "See how he chortles. He is radiant with delight, and mad with desire. He can scarcely keep still, and were it not for very shame, he would jump the footlights and kiss me before the whole audience. So, so, Marquis de Bruyères, you are fond of stage maids, are you? Well, you shall have one of them, highly seasoned too."

From that moment, Zerbina exerted all her powers and played as if she were possessed. She fairly blazed with gaiety, wit, and ardour, and the Marquis felt that henceforth he could not possibly do without that bitter-sweet sensation. Every other woman who had ever granted him favours and whom he mentally compared with Zerbina, seemed to him colourless, savourless, and wearisome.

The play by Scudéry, which was next rehearsed, gave pleasure, though it was less amusing, and Leander, who played the part of Lygdamon, was delightful in it. But instead of talking of the talent of my players, let me leave them and return to the Duke de Vallombreuse and his friend Vidalinc.

COMPLICATIONS ARISE

Transported with rage after the scene in which he had not carried off the honours, the young Duke had returned to Vallombreuse House with his confidant, turning over innumerable projects of vengeance, of which the mildest was a resolve to have the insolent Captain thrashed to death.

Vidalinc endeavoured, but unsuccessfully, to quiet him; the Duke wrung his hands in his anger and stormed about the room like a lunatic, striking at the arm-chairs, that tumbled over in comical fashion with their legs in the air, upsetting the tables, and doing, while giving vent to his fury, a terrible deal of damage. Finally he seized a vase of Japanese porcelain and hurled it to the floor, where it broke into a thousand pieces.

"Oh!" he cried, "I wish I could smash that insolent scoundrel just in the same way, trample upon him, and sweep his remains on to a dirt-heap! A villain who dares to come between me and the object of my desires! If only he were a gentleman, I would fight him with sword, dagger, or pistol, on foot or on horseback, until I set my foot on his chest and spat in his dead face!"

"I should not wonder if he were a gentleman," said Vidalinc. "Indeed I am inclined to think his assurance proves it. Bilot mentioned that one of the

had joined the company for love, and that looked favourably upon him. He must be , if I may judge by his jealousy and the young emotion."

at an idea!" returned Vallombreuse. "Do pose that a man of rank would mingle with like these, walk the boards, paint his face, and ing slapped and kicked? No, it is utterly out uestion."

ter did transform himself into an animal and a husband in order to enjoy the possession of voman," answered Vidaline; "and for a god, coming down a good deal more than turning n is for a nobleman."

matter," said the Duke, striking a gong. "I st punish the stroller, and later I shall punish

that case my vengeance will not expend itself in the void, and will find a breast into which to plunge."

A servant entered, bowed low, and remained motionless awaiting his master's orders.

"Call up, if they have gone to bed, Basque, Azolan, Mérindol, and Labriche. Tell them to provide themselves with stout cudgels and to go and await at the door of the tennis-court, where Herod's players are performing, a certain Captain Fracasse. Let them charge him, and thrash him into insensibility, without going the length of killing him, however; else it might be supposed I was afraid of the man. I shall be responsible for the consequences. And when they are thrashing him, let them call out to him, 'This from the Duke de Vallombreuse!' so that he may know well whence it comes."

This somewhat ferocious order did not appear to surprise the lackey greatly, and he withdrew, assuring the Duke that his Grace's orders should be at once carried out.

"I own," said Vidalinc, when the servant had withdrawn, "that I regret your having that player treated in such fashion, for, after all, he showed a spirit above his profession. Let me go and pick a quarrel with

some pretext or other, and kill him off for you.
d is red when it is let out, although that of
said to be blue. I am of a good old family,
of not such high rank as you, and my suscepti-
es not fear being endangered. Say the word,
n off. That captain seems to me worthier of
d than of the cudgel."

hank you," said the Duke, "for your offer,
a proof of your thorough devotion to my
yet I cannot accept it. The beast dared to
ls upon me, and it is right that he should
his crime ignominiously. If he should prove
man of rank, he will readily enough be an-
for I always reply to those who put their ques-
the sword's point."

IX

SWORD PLAY, CUDGEL PLAY

AND OTHER ADVENTURES

THE rehearsal was over and the players had withdrawn to their dressing-rooms to change into every-day dress. Sigognac did the same, but, anticipating an attack, he kept on the sword he wore in the part of Hector. It had a good old Spanish blade, as long as a day of starvation, with an open-work shell-hilt that thoroughly protected the wrist, and, handled by a brave man, was capable of parrying blows and returning them too, — though not mortal ones, for it was blunt and with dulled edge, as is the custom with stage weapons. Such as it was, however, it would amply suffice to punish the lackeys whom the Duke de Vallombreuse had ordered to avenge him.

Herod, a stout, broad-shouldered carle, armed himself with the cudgel he used to signal the raising of the curtain, and with this species of mace, which

he handled as if it were a straw, he undertook to soundly belabour any ruffians that might attack Sigognac; for it was not in his nature to leave his friends in the lurch.

"Captain," said he to the Baron, when they got into the street, "let the ladies, whose shrieks would deafen us, go on ahead of us under the escort of Leander and Blazius; the former is only a fop, cowardly as a hare, and the other is much too old, and his strength is not as great as his courage. Scappino shall stay with us, for no one can trip up a man in more deft fashion, and in less than a minute he will have laid out, like stuffed pigs, one or two of the rascals, — that is, assuming they attack us, — and in any event my cudgel shall back up your rapier."

"I thank you, my brave Herod," returned Sigognac; "such an offer as yours is not to be declined; but let us go warily, lest we be attacked unexpectedly. We shall walk in the middle of the street, at a short distance one behind another. These rascals, who are in ambush, are certainly keeping close to the wall in the shadow; they will have to come forth in order to reach us, and that will give us time to see them approach. Now, then, let me draw; do you brandish

your mace, and let Scappino work his muscles to make sure his legs work right."

Sigognac placed himself at the head of the party and advanced prudently into the lane that led from the tennis-court to "The French Arms." It was dark and tortuous, and very uneven; in a word, admirably suited to an ambuscade. No light came from the houses, in which everybody was sound asleep, and it happened that there was no moon that night.

Basque, Azolan, Mérindol, and Labriche, the young Duke's ruffians, had been waiting for more than half an hour until Captain Fracasse, who must necessarily come that way, should pass along. Azolan and Basque had hidden themselves in the recess of a door on the street side, while Mérindol and Labriche, standing close to the wall, had posted themselves right opposite, so that their cudgels should converge upon Sigognac's back, like the hammers of Cyclops. The group of women escorted by Leander and Blazius had warned them that Sigognac could not now be long coming, and they stood firmly planted, their hands clasping their cudgels, ready to do their duty, and utterly unsuspicious of the fact that they were in for a fight, — poets, players, and citizens, whom the great deign to

have thrashed, being accustomed to take their chastisement quietly, and being satisfied to bend their backs under the blows.

Sigognac, who was very sharp-sighted, had already, though the night was very dark, made out the four rascals in their ambush. He stopped as if about to retrace his steps. This feint deceived the four villains, who thought their prey was escaping them, and left their ambuscade to charge the Captain. Azolan was the first to spring forward, and they all shouted: "Kill him! kill him! This to Captain Fracasse from the Duke de Vallombreuse!"

Sigognac had wrapped his cloak round his left arm, making a sort of roll that was impervious to blows, and with which he parried the blow dealt him by Azolan, while at the same time he lunged at him with his rapier and struck him so fiercely in the chest that the wretch rolled into the gutter, his breast-bone smashed, his feet in the air, and his hat in the mud. Had the point not been dulled, the blade would have gone clean through him and come out between his shoulders. Basque, undeterred by his comrade's misfortune, stepped forward bravely, but a terrific sword-cut over the head broke his skull for him, and made

him see more stars than were shining on that night, which was dark as pitch. Herod's mace broke Mérindol's cudgel into flinders, and the fellow, finding himself disarmed, took to flight, though he could not avoid, quick as he was in taking to his heels, many a bruise inflicted by the mighty staff. As for Scappino, he clasped Labriche round the body so swiftly and so surely that the man, half choked, was unable to use his cudgel. Then forcing him on to his left arm, while at the same time he nearly broke his back with his right, he lifted him off the ground with a quick, sharp, irresistible cross-buttock and sent him flying to the ground a dozen yards away. Labriche struck the nape of his neck against a stone, and the blow was so tremendous that the Duke's ruffian swooned away on the field of battle, looking like a dead man.

The street was cleared, and victory was with the players; Azolan and Basque, crawling on all fours, were trying to reach an awning under which they might recover their senses. Labriche lay in the gutter like a drunken man, and Mérindol, the least hurt of the lot, had fled; no doubt in order that one at least might survive the disaster and be able to report it.

Nevertheless, as he drew near Vallombreuse House he slackened his steps, for he would have to face the anger of the young Duke, which he dreaded as much as Herod's staff. At the mere thought of it the perspiration streamed down his face, and he forgot the pain of his dislocated shoulder, from which his arm hung limp and inert like an empty sleeve.

He had scarcely re-entered the mansion when the Duke, impatient to learn the success of the attack, had him summoned. Mérindol entered with awkward and embarrassed mien, for his shoulder pained him greatly; he was turning pale and green in spite of the sunburn on his face, and his brow was wet with perspiration. He stood at the door motionless and silent, awaiting a word of encouragement or a question from the Duke, who, however, remained mute.

"Well," said the Chevalier de Vidalinc at last, seeing that Vallombreuse was looking very grimly at Mérindol, "what news have you brought? Not very good, I fancy, for you do not look particularly happy."

"Your Grace," answered Mérindol, "knows that we are all zealous in the discharge of our duty, but on this occasion fortune has proved unpropitious."

"What do you mean?" said the Duke, with an angry gesture. "Have the four of you not managed to thrash that mummer?"

"That mummer, my lord," returned Mérindol, "is braver and more vigorous than the Hercules of fable. He rushed at us so fiercely that, turning assailant instead of being assailed, he laid out Azolan and Basque in a twinkling. Stout fellows though they be, they went down before him like straw. Labriche was disabled by another one of the actors who practised some trick of gymnastics upon him, and the nape of his neck has ascertained the hardness of the Poictiers paving-stones. For myself I had my cudgel smashed by the mace of Master Herod, and my shoulder dislocated so badly that I shall not be able to use my arm for a fortnight."

"You are a pack of calves, of louts; pitiful ruffians, devoid of skill, courage, and devotion!" roared the Duke de Vallombreuse, beside himself with rage. "Any old woman could put you to flight with her distaff. A pretty mistake I made in saving the lot of you from the galleys and the gallows. I might just as well have a number of honest fellows in my service; they could not possibly prove more cowardly or more incapable.

When you found that sticks would not do, you should have taken to your swords."

"Your Grace gave orders for a thrashing, and not for a murder," answered Mérindol, "and we would not have dared to take upon ourselves to do more."

"Well," said Vidalinc, breaking into laughter, "you are a mightily careful, precise, and conscientious rascal. I love to see such candour in one of your breed, I must say. This little adventure is starting off in fairly romantic fashion, and ought to be satisfactory to you, Vallombreuse, since you object to smoothly running intrigues and delight in obstacles. It seems to me that, for an actress, Isabella is hard to get at; she dwells in a tower that has no drawbridge, and which is guarded, like such towers in romances of chivalry, by dragons breathing out fire and smoke. But I see that our routed host has returned."

At this moment Azolan, Basque, and Labriche, who had recovered from his swoon, appeared at the door of the room, their hands outstretched in supplication towards the Duke. They were wan, and filthy with blood and mud, although they had received no worse wounds than contusions; but the violence of the blows had made them bleed at the nose, and the yellow

leather of their buff jerkins was shockingly stained with crimson splashes.

"Get back to your kennels, you hounds!" cried the Duke, who felt no sympathy for them, when his eyes fell upon the crippled company. "I have a great mind to have you thrashed for your stupidity and your cowardice. My chirurgeon shall examine you and report to me whether the wounds you complain of are serious, and if they are not, I shall have you skinned alive like eels. Away with you!"

The discomfited ruffians needed no second order and vanished as if they were unhurt, so great was the terror the young Duke inspired in the breasts of these bravoes, every one of them food for the hangman, and who were not naturally cowards.

When they had withdrawn, Vallombreuse threw himself on a pile of cushions and remained plunged in silence, which Vidaline refrained from breaking. Angry thoughts raged in his brain like black clouds driven by a furious wind across a stormy sky. He was minded to set fire to the inn, to kill Captain Fracasse, to drown the whole company of players. For the first time in his life he had met with resistance! He had ordered something to be done, and it had not been done! A

mere strolling actor had dared to affront him! His people had fled after being thrashed by a stage buffoon! His pride rose in revolt at the thought, and he felt as if stupefied. It was possible, then, that a man should actually stand up to him! Then he remembered that, though dressed in a splendid costume, glittering with diamonds, in all the glory of his beauty, he had been unable to obtain a single favourable glance from a mere chit of a girl, a strolling actress, a doll exposed every night to be hissed by the first boor that came along, — he, Vallombreuse, whom princesses welcomed with smiles, whom duchesses died of love for, and who had never yet met with a repulse. He gnashed his teeth with rage, and his hands tore at the splendid white satin doublet that he had not yet taken off, as if to punish it for having seconded him so ill in his plans for the seduction of the girl.

At last he rose abruptly, waved a farewell to his friend Vidalinc, and withdrew, without touching the supper that had just been served, into his bedroom, where sleep failed to close the damask curtains of his bed.

Vidalinc, his mind pleasantly filled with thoughts of Serafina, did not notice that he was supping alone, and

ate with a very good appetite. Then, cradled by voluptuous dreams in which the young actress figured invariably, he slept soundly until the next morning.

When Sigognac, Herod, and Scappino got back to the inn, they found the other players a prey to alarm. The shouts of "Kill! kill!" and the noise of the encounter had reached the ears of Isabella and her companions through the silence of night. The young girl had nearly fainted, and but for Blazius, who supported her, she would have sunk to the ground. Pale as wax and trembling all over, she was standing on the threshold of her room waiting for news. At the sight of Sigognac unwounded and whole, she uttered a faint cry, raised her arms to heaven and let them fall round the young man's neck, hiding her face against his shoulder with a lovely gesture of maidenly shame. Speedily mastering her emotion, however, she freed herself from his clasp, drew back, and resumed her usual reserve.

"You are sure you are not wounded?" she asked in her sweetest tones. "I should be so unhappy if harm came to you through me. But how rash of you to brave that handsome, wicked Duke, who has the glance and the pride of Lucifer, and all for the sake of a poor girl like me! You are not sensible, Sigognac;

now that you are a player like ourselves, you must learn to bear with certain impertinences."

"I shall never permit any one," answered Sigognac, "to insult the adorable Isabella in my presence, even though I wear the mask of a swashbuckler."

"Well spoken, Captain," said Herod. "Well spoken, and even better done. For by the rood, you did thrust fiercely at them. Lucky it was for these rascals that Hector's sword was dulled, else you would have cut them down from the head to the feet, as the knight-errants were wont to treat Saracens and enchanters."

"Your staff wrought as sturdily as did my rapier," returned Sigognac, paying Herod's compliment back, "and your conscience must be at rest, for it was not innocents whom you devoted to slaughter this time."

"Not by a good deal," answered the Tyrant, laughing loud out of his big black beard. "They are the very cream of the galleys, regular gallows-birds."

"It goes without saying," said Sigognac, "that such jobs cannot be undertaken by decent people. But we must not forget to celebrate as it deserves the heroic valour displayed by Scappino, who fought and con-

quered without other weapons than those nature has provided him with."

Scappino, who was a buffoon, humped himself up, as if swelling with the praise, put his hand on his heart, cast down his eyes, and made a comic bow full of modesty.

"I would have gladly accompanied you," said Blazius, "but my head wags on my shoulders, owing to my age, and I am only fit nowadays to handle jorums in a drinking bout."

Their talk over, the players, as it was getting late, withdrew each to his room, save Sigognac, who walked up and down the gallery for some time longer, as if revolving a project. The comedian was avenged, but not the nobleman. Was he to throw off the mask that secured his incognito, reveal his true name, and perhaps draw down upon his comrades the young Duke's anger? Common prudence urged him not to do so, but honour affirmed he should. The Baron could not resist this imperious voice, and walked towards Zerbina's room.

He knocked gently at the door, which was at first partially opened, but which opened fully at the mention of his name. The room was brilliantly lighted; handsome candelabra, filled with rose-coloured tapers, were

placed on a table covered with a symmetrically laid damask-cloth, upon which was set a choice supper served on silver plate. Two partridges, enwrapped in slices of golden bacon, stood in the centre of a circle of sliced oranges, and were flanked by blanc-manger and a forcemeat fish-pie, the triumph of Master Bilot's art. In a crystal flagon, dotted with gilt ornaments, sparkled ruby-coloured wine, with another similar companion flagon, filled with topaz-coloured wine. Places were laid for two, and when Sigognac entered, Zerbina was pledging the Marquis de Bruyères in a bumper. The Marquis's eyes were afire with a double intoxication, for never had the tricky Zerbina been more seductive, while, on the other hand, the Marquis held that Venus is apt to be benumbed unless she is accompanied by Ceres and Bacchus.

Zerbina bestowed upon Sigognac a graceful nod which united skilfully the familiarity of the actress towards her comrade and the respect of the woman for the nobleman.

"It is very kind of you," said the Marquis de Bruyères, "to come and surprise us in our lovers' retreat, and I hope that, without being afraid of breaking in upon our tête-à-tête, you will do us the pleasure

of taking supper with us. James, a plate for the Baron."

"I accept your courteous invitation," said Sigognac, "not because I am very hungry, but because I do not wish to interfere with your meal, and there is nothing so unpleasant as to have a guest who will not eat."

The Baron took the arm-chair placed for him by James opposite the Marquis and by Zerbina's side. M. de Bruyères helped him to the wing of a partridge, and filled his glass without asking a single question; for as a man of quality and high breeding, he had guessed that it must be a serious matter which had brought Sigognac, usually so reserved and unapproachable, to the room at that hour.

"Do you like red wine, or do you prefer white?" asked the Marquis. "For myself I drink both, so as not to excite any jealousy between them."

"I am naturally and by habit very moderate in my drinking," answered Sigognac, "and I temper Bacchus with nymphs, as the ancients used to say. The red wine will answer perfectly. But it is not for the purpose of feasting with you that I have trespassed upon your loves at this unseemly hour. I have come, Marquis, to ask of you a favour which one nobleman

never refuses to another. Mlle. Zerbina has no doubt told you that this evening, in the ladies' dressing-room, the Duke de Vallombreuse attempted to put his hand into Isabella's bosom, under pretext of putting on a patch, — a foul, lascivious, and brutal act, in no wise warranted by any coquetry or advances on the part of the young lady, who is as discreet as she is modest, and for whom I entertain the highest respect."

"And she fully deserves it," put in Zerbina; "though I am a woman and her comrade, I could not, even did I wish to do so, find a word to say against her."

"I caught hold of the Duke's arm," continued Sigognac, "and his Grace broke out in angry threats and invective to which I replied with sarcastic coolness, under the protection of my Hector disguise. The Duke threatened to have me thrashed by his lackeys, and kept his promise, for, as I was returning to the inn along a dark lane, four scoundrels rushed upon me. I laid out a couple of them with the flat of my sword, while Herod and Scappino punished the other two in proper fashion. Now, though the Duke imagined he had to deal with a poor player only, the player happens to be a nobleman, and the outrage cannot remain unpunished. You know who I am, Marquis, though

you have respected my wish to remain unknown; you know my family, and you can bear witness to the fact that the Sigognacs have been nobles for a thousand years, free from any low-born connections, and that not one of them ever suffered his honour to be attacked."

"Baron de Sigognac," said the Marquis de Bruyères, for the first time addressing his guest by his real name, "I am prepared to bear witness to the antiquity and noble rank of your family before whomsoever you please. Palamedes de Sigognac greatly distinguished himself in the first Crusade, leading one hundred lances on a galley fitted out at his own cost. That was at a time when many a nobleman who now boasts of his high estate did not count even an esquire among his forefathers. Palamedes was a great friend of Hugh de Bruyères, my ancestor, and they slept together in the same tent, like brothers in arms."

Sigognac looked up proudly as the Marquis recalled these glorious remembrances; the spirit of his ancestors stirred within him, and Zerbina, who was looking at him, was struck by the singular inward beauty, so to speak, that illumined, like the reflection of a fire, the Baron's usually sad face.

"These noblemen," said she to herself, "seem to have sprung from the loins of Jupiter; the least word stirs up their pride, and they are unable to swallow an insult as do ordinary people. All the same, if the Baron were to look at me in that way, I should be quite willing to be unfaithful to the Marquis in his favour. He fairly blazes with heroism."

"Then, since that is your opinion of my family," said the Baron to the Marquis, "I may count on you to call out the Duke de Vallombreuse in my name, and to take my challenge to him?"

"Assuredly," returned the Marquis, in a grave, studied tone that contrasted with his usual lightness; "and further, I place my sword at your service as your second. I shall call at Vallombreuse House in the morning. The Duke is insolent, it is true, but he is no coward, and he will not shelter himself behind his rank as soon as he learns who you really are. But enough on that subject; we shall be wearying Zerbina with our men's quarrels. I can see her ruby lips contracting, in spite of her manners, and laughter, not yawns, must disclose the pearls of which her mouth is the casket. Come, Zerbina, brighten up once more, and help the Baron to wine."

Gracefully and dexterously the maid carried out the request. The conversation turned upon Zerbina's acting. The Marquis loaded her with compliments, which Sigognac endorsed without being guilty of flattery or obligatory civility, for she had unquestionably played with incomparable spirit, dash, and talent. They also discussed the lines of M. de Scudéry, one of the cleverest wits of the day, though the Marquis considered they were somewhat soporific, preferring, for his part, "The Rodomontades of Captain Fracasse," to "Lygdamon and Lydias." The Marquis was a man of taste.

Sigognac seized an early opportunity of taking leave, and withdrew to his room, the door of which he bolted. Then from a serge case, intended to protect it from rust, he took an old sword, his father's, which he had brought away with him as a faithful friend. He drew it slowly from the sheath, and respectfully kissed the hilt. It was a handsome weapon; richly though not excessively ornamented; a weapon meant for use and not for mere show. The blade, of bluish steel inlaid with narrow gold lines, bore the mark of one of the most famous sword-makers of Toledo. Sigognac took a woollen rag and rubbed the steel

until it shone with all its pristine brilliancy. He tested the edge and the point with his finger; then, placing the point against the door, he tried the suppleness of the blade by bending it until it formed almost a complete circle. The trusty steel stood these tests nobly, and it was plain that it would not fail its owner upon the duelling-ground. Excited by the gleam of the blade, and feeling the hilt lie comfortably in his hand, Sigognac practised fencing against the wall, and soon perceived that he had not forgotten the lessons which Peter, who had been a fencing-master, had been in the habit of giving him during their long enforced leisure in Poverty Hall.

The practice he had indulged in with his old servitor, unable as he was to attend an academy, as was the wont of young noblemen, had developed his strength, hardened his muscles, and increased his natural suppleness. Having nothing else to do, he had become passionately fond of fencing, and had very thoroughly studied that noble art; so that, though he still fancied himself a beginner, he had really long since become a master, and in the assaults at arms in which they took part, he frequently pinked Peter on the buff jerkin he wore by way of protection. It is true that he was so

modest as to believe Peter allowed himself to be hit in order not to discourage him by parries that could never be broken down; but therein he was mistaken. The old fencing-master had not kept back any of the secrets of his art from his beloved pupil. For many a year he had kept him practising the principles of sword-play, in spite of the distaste Sigognac occasionally manifested for the constant repetition of such exercises, so that the young man had become as skilful as his teacher, while, thanks to his youth, he was quicker and more supple. His sight was better also, and the result was that Peter, though prepared with a parry for every thrust, could not as surely as formerly divert the Baron's blade. These successes of his pupil, which would have angered an ordinary fencing-master, filled the heart of the old servitor with a pride and delight which he carefully concealed from the Baron, lest the latter should grow careless, and believe he had attained perfection and carried off the palm.

Thus it happened that in an age of experts, of ear-slitters, of swashbucklers, of professional duellists and bravoes, who frequented the schools of Spanish and Neapolitan fencing-masters for the purpose of learning secret thrusts and treacherous strokes, the young

Baron, who had never left his tower save to follow after a wretched hare in the tracks of Miraut, had become, though wholly unconscious of the fact, one of the best blades of the day and capable of holding his own with the most famous swordsmen. He lacked, it was true, the insolent elegance, the assured attitude, the provocative air of some of the nobles renowned for their prowess on the duelling-ground, but it would have taken a very skilful blade to make its way into the narrow circle of his guard.

Satisfied with himself and his sword, which he laid by his bedhead, Sigognac soon fell asleep as soundly as though he had not requested the Marquis de Bruyères to challenge the powerful Duke de Vallombreuse in his name.

Isabella, however, could not close her eyes. She had quickly come to the conclusion that Sigognac would not let the matter drop, but, while she feared the consequences of the quarrel for her friend, it never occurred to her to interfere between the adversaries. In those days affairs of honour were looked upon as sacred, and women would not have ventured to interfere with them or to intervene with tears.

SWORD PLAY, CUDGEL PLAY

By nine o'clock, the Marquis, fully dressed, called on Sigognac in the latter's room for the purpose of settling the terms of the combat. Sigognac insisted that he should take with him, in the event of unbelief or refusal on the part of the Duke, the old charters, the ancient parchments, from which hung great seals of wax on silken cords, the letters patent, with worn folds and royal signatures in faded ink, the genealogical tree with its numerous branches covered with escutcheons, all the papers, in a word, that testified to the nobility of the Sigognacs. These illustrious deeds, the undecipherable Gothic caligraphy of which would have taxed the eyesight and the skill of a Benedictine monk, were piously wrapped up in a piece of crimson taffeta yellowed by age, and which might have been a remnant of the banner that of yore fluttered in the van of the hundred lances led by Baron Palamedes de Sigognac against the Saracen host.

"It does not appear to me," said the Marquis, "that there is any need, on this occasion, of your establishing your nobility as if you were approaching the College of Heralds. My word, which no one has ever questioned, will be sufficient. However, as the Duke de Vallombreuse may, through excess of contempt and

mad pride, pretend that he can know you only as Captain Fracasse, a player in the pay of Master Herod, I shall take these deeds, which my man shall bring along in case I find it necessary to make use of them."

"Act as you think best," answered Sigognac; "I trust entirely to your good sense, and leave my honour in your hands."

"Rest assured that I shall know how to guard it," answered the Marquis, "and that we shall bring to book that insolent Duke, whose outrageous manners are most offensive to me. A Baron's coronet and the leaves and pearls of a Marquis equal the strawberry leaves of a Duke, when the family is old and its blood free from mixture. But we have talked enough; now let us act. Words are feminine, deeds alone are masculine, and honour can be washed in blood only, as the Spaniards say."

Whereupon the Marquis summoned his valet, handed him the packet of papers, and left the inn for Vallombreuse House in order to carry out his mission.

The Duke, agitated and angered by the events of the previous night, was not yet awake, as it had been late ere he had fallen asleep. Consequently his valet, when ordered by the Marquis de Bruyères to inform

his Grace that he was waiting upon him, opened his eyes like saucers, fairly staggered by the request. It would have been no more dangerous to enter the cage of an African lion or of an Indian tiger than to awaken the Duke and to enter the room before he had rung his bell; for even when his lordship had gone to bed in a good temper, he was apt to be savage in the morning.

"Your lordship had better wait," said the man, trembling at the audacity of the order he had received, "or else call again later. His Grace has not yet rung, and I dare not take on myself—"

"Announce the Marquis de Bruyères," called out Zerbina's friend in a voice that began to sound angry, "or I shall burst in the door and introduce myself. I must see your master on the instant on important business in which honour is involved."

"It is a duel, then?" said the valet, immediately becoming obsequious. "Why did your lordship not mention the fact at once? I shall take your lordship's name to his Grace, who went to bed last night in such a man-eating temper that he will be delighted to awake to a quarrel and to have a pretext for fighting."

And with a resolute mien the lackey entered the Duke's apartments, after having begged the Marquis to be kind enough to wait for a moment.

At the sound of the door opening and closing, Vallombreuse, who was only half asleep, opened his eyes wide, and springing up so suddenly that the bedstead creaked, sat up and looked round for something to throw at the man's head.

"The devil take the dolt that breaks in upon my sleep!" he shouted in an angry voice. "Did I not order you never to presume to enter before I had rung for you? You shall receive a hundred lashes on your bare back for your disobedience. I shall never get asleep again now. For one instant I feared you might be the too loving Corisande."

"Your Grace may have me beaten to death, if it please your Grace, but I did not venture to disobey orders without good reason. The Marquis de Bruyères is below, and desires to speak to your Grace; about an affair of honour, his lordship gave me to understand. And your Grace never denies himself to such callers and always receives visitors on errands of that nature."

"The Marquis de Bruyères?" queried the young Duke. "Did I quarrel with him? I cannot remem-

ber doing so, and besides, it is long since we have met. Perhaps he fancies that I mean to take away Zerbina from him; men in love are always imagining that others are jealous of them. Well, Picard, give me my dressing-gown and draw the bed-curtains, to conceal the disorder of my couch. I must not keep the worthy Marquis waiting."

Picard handed to the Duke a magnificent gown, cut in the Venetian fashion, which he fetched from a wardrobe. It was of golden stuff with a pattern of great black flowers worked in velvet. Vallombreuse drew the girdle tightly around his waist, in order to show off its slimness, sat down in an arm-chair, assumed a careless air, and said to the lackey : —

"Now show in his lordship."

"The Marquis de Bruyères," called out Picard, throwing the door wide-open.

"Good-morning, Marquis," said the young Duke de Vallombreuse, half-rising from his arm-chair, "and welcome, whatever the reason that brings you. Picard, a chair for his lordship. You must pardon my receiving you in an untidy room and in morning undress; it is not through lack of civility, but through desire not to keep you waiting."

"And I beg you will excuse," returned the Marquis, "my insisting so savagely upon disturbing your sleep, filled, as it no doubt was, with delightful dreams; but I have undertaken to bear to you a message of a nature that, between men of our class, brooks no delay."

"You excite my curiosity in the highest degree," answered Vallombreuse, "but I am at a loss to guess your urgent business."

"Probably you have forgotten certain incidents that occurred last night, my lord Duke; such trifling matters not being important enough to impress themselves upon you. I shall therefore, with your leave, refresh your memory. In the actresses' dressing-room you condescended to pay particular attention to a young lady who takes the parts of *ingénues;* Isabella is her name, if I mistake not. And in a playful mood, which for my part I have not the heart to blame, you endeavoured to affix a patch upon her bosom. This attempt, which I refrain from commenting upon, deeply shocked one of the players, Captain Fracasse, who was bold enough to seize your arm."

"You are a most faithful and conscientious historian," put in Vallombreuse. "You have accurately related what took place, and I shall finish the account of the

affair by adding that I promised the fellow, who was as insolent as a lord, a sound cudgelling, that being the form of punishment most appropriate to such a lout as he."

"There is no great harm in having actors or scribblers with whom one is displeased thrashed soundly," said the Marquis, with an air of utter indifference. "These people are scarcely worthy of the sticks that one breaks on their backs, but in this case it is quite another matter. Captain Fracasse, who, besides, thrashed your bullies in glorious fashion, happens to be Baron de Sigognac, a nobleman of very old family and of the best blood in Gascony. There is not a word to be said to his detriment."

"What the devil is he doing among these strollers?" answered the young Duke de Vallombreuse, as he toyed with the cords of his girdle. "And how could I imagine that it was a Sigognac who was got up in that ridiculous costume and that red nose?"

"Your first question," said the Marquis, "I can reply to in a few words. Between you and me, I fancy the Baron is desperately in love with Isabella, and as he could not induce her to stay in his castle, he joined the company in order to pursue his amours. You will certainly not disapprove such conduct,

since it is his lady-love herself who has struck your fancy."

"No; I grant all that. But you must allow that I could not possibly divine the romance, and that Captain Fracasse's act was impertinent."

"Impertinent if done by an actor," returned the Marquis, "but quite natural on the part of a gentleman, jealous of his mistress. That is why Captain Fracasse has thrown aside his mask and comes forward as Baron de Sigognac to challenge you through me and to call you to account for the insult offered him."

"Very good," said Vallombreuse, "but what guarantee have I that this supposed Sigognac, who plays the part of a stage swashbuckler in a company of mummers, is not an intriguing fellow of low condition who has usurped an honoured name in order to have the honour of crossing his stage lath with my rapier?"

"Duke," replied the Marquis de Bruyères in a dignified tone, "I should not act as second and supporter to any one not well born. I am personally acquainted with Baron de Sigognac, who resides but a short distance from my place. I go bail for him. And besides, should you still entertain any doubts concerning his rank, I have with me documents that will entirely re-

move your scruples. Permit me to summon my valet who is waiting in the anteroom, and who will hand you the parchments."

"That is quite unnecessary," returned the Duke. "Your word is sufficient, and I accept the challenge. My friend, the Chevalier de Vidalinc, will be my second. Pray make all necessary arrangements with him; any weapons and any terms will be equally satisfactory to me. Indeed, I shall not be sorry to ascertain whether Baron de Sigognac is as skilful at parrying sword-thrusts as he is at warding off the blows of cudgels. The lovely Isabella shall crown with bays the victor in the tourney, as in the palmy days of chivalry. And now allow me to withdraw. Vidalinc, who lives in the house, will be down in a moment, and you can settle place, time, and weapons with him. Meantime *beso a vuestra merced la maño, caballero.*"

As he spoke these words, the Duke de Vallombreuse bowed with studied courtesy to the Marquis de Bruyères, raised a heavy portière of tapestry, and disappeared.

A few minutes later the Chevalier de Vidalinc joined the Marquis, and the pair speedily settled the conditions of the duel. The natural weapon of gentlemen,

the sword, was selected, and the time fixed for the morrow, as Sigognac desired to avoid a postponement of the performance advertised throughout the whole town, which would be inevitable if he chanced to be slain or wounded. The meeting-place was to be outside the walls, in a meadow that was a favourite rendezvous of the Poictiers duellists, on account of its remoteness, the firmness of the ground, and its natural conveniences.

The Marquis de Bruyères returned to "The French Arms" and reported the result of his mission to Sigognac, who thanked him warmly for having managed matters so well, for he still raged inwardly at the thought of the insolent and libertine glances the young Duke had cast upon Isabella.

The performance was to begin at three o'clock, and since the morning the town-crier had been perambulating the streets and advertising the show with beat of drum, as soon as a circle of curiously minded people had formed around him. The rascal had the lungs of a Stentor, and being accustomed to proclaim edicts, he brought out the titles of the plays and the names of the actors in the most pompous and sonorous voice, making the very panes tremble in the sashes and the

glasses clatter in unison on the tables inside the houses. He had, besides, a mechanical fashion of moving his chin as he delivered his announcements, that made him look like a Nuremberg nut-cracker, and delighted all the little street rascals. Not the ears only of the public, but their eyes also were appealed to, and those of the inhabitants who had not heard the crier could read, in the most frequented crossways, on the walls of the tennis-court, and on the doors of "The French Arms," huge posters on which figured the titles "Lygdamon and Lydias," and "The Rodomontades of Captain Fracasse," in capital letters cleverly alternated in red and black ink, and due to the brush of Scappino, sign-writer to the company. These posters were done in lapidary style, after the manner of the Romans, and purists could have no fault to find with them.

One of the inn servants, who had been dressed up as theatre porter, in a parti-coloured green and yellow smock-frock, with a wide baldric supporting a big rusty sword, and a broad-brimmed beaver pulled down to the eyes and surmounted by a feather tall enough to sweep the cobwebs from the ceiling, kept back the crowd at the door, which he defended with a partisan, allowing no one to enter unless he had first paid for

his seat, or at least exhibited a proper admission ticket. In vain did numbers of lawyers' clerks, of students, pages, and lackeys endeavour to enter surreptitiously, and to crawl under the redoubtable weapon; the vigilant Cerberus tumbled them into the street, where some rolled into the gutter head over heels, to the great delight of the others, who roared with laughter as the victims, covered with mud and filth, tried to rise.

The ladies arrived in sedan chairs carried by athletic fellows who trotted along with their light burdens. Some gentlemen who had ridden up on horses or mules threw the bridles to lackeys placed there for the purpose. Two or three coaches, the paintings on the panels faded and the gilding grown rusty, that had been drawn from the coach-houses for this solemn occasion, drew near the door slowly, drawn by big horses, and from them emerged, as from a Noah's ark, all manner of country hobbledehoys of most peculiar aspect, and rigged out in garments that had been in fashion in the lifetime of the late king. Nevertheless these coaches, ramshackle though they were, impressed the crowd that had collected to watch the people entering the theatre, and when they were drawn up on the

square, side by side, they produced quite a respectable effect.

The hall was soon filled so completely that a needle could not have been got in. On either side the stage, arm-chairs had been placed for persons of rank, an arrangement that unquestionably interfered with the illusion intended to be produced on the stage and with the performance of the actors, but as people were accustomed to it, its absurdity struck no one. The young Duke de Vallombreuse was seated there with his friend the Chevalier de Vidalinc; the former in black velvet, heavily trimmed with jet and a mass of lace, the latter in lovely dark-purple satin, trimmed with gold. The Marquis de Bruyères, who wished to applaud Zerbina without attracting too much attention, had secured a seat in the orchestra behind the musicians.

A number of boxes had been built along the sides of the hall; they were made of deal boards covered with serge and old Flemish tapestries. The centre of the room was turned into the pit, and accommodated the poorer townsmen, the shopmen, lawyers' clerks, apprentices, students, lackeys, and the rest of the rabble.

Ladies, dressed as splendidly as country wardrobes, somewhat behind the court fashions, permitted, settled down in the boxes, spreading out their skirts, and with a deft touch round the upper part of their bodices displayed the charms of their white bosoms. The worthy Poictiers public, however, was not connoisseur enough to know the difference between show and elegance, and was quite pleasantly dazzled. Besides, there were brought out on this occasion fine old family diamonds that, though mounted in antique and dulled settings, were nevertheless of great value; very old lace, somewhat yellow with age, it is true, but well-nigh priceless; long chains of twenty-four carat gold, old-fashioned too, but none the less very heavy; precious brocades and silk stuffs handed down from generation to generation, and such as neither Lyons nor Venice can now turn out. And there were even pretty, rosy, blooming, healthy faces which would have made quite a sensation at Saint-Germain and Paris, though their expression was rather too candid and ingenuous.

Some of the ladies, desiring apparently to remain unknown, kept on their small half-masks, but this did not prevent the gossips in the pit from making out who they were and telling more or less scandalous

stories about them. Yet there was one lady, alone in her box and attended only by a woman who seemed to be her maid, who, masked more closely than her neighbours, kept somewhat in the background, and whom the most inquisitive were unable to make out. Her head was covered with a black lace veil fastened under the chin, so that not even the colour of her hair could be seen. Her dress, of rich dark stuff, seemed to melt into the shadow of the box, in which she carefully kept, unlike the other ladies, who sought to profit by the light of the tapers to be well seen. Frequently she raised to her face, as though to protect her eyes from the glare, a black feather fan, with a mirror in the centre, into which, however, she did not look.

The orchestra, now striking up, recalled every one's attention to the stage, and people forgot the mysterious beauty, who might have been taken for Calderon's *dama tapada*.

The performance began with "Lygdamon and Lydias." The scene, which represented a country landscape, green with trees and carpeted with moss, watered by fresh springs and bounded in the distance by a range of blue hills, took the public's fancy and inclined it to look forward with favour to the play

itself. Leander, who had the part of Lygdamon, was dressed in a purplish pastoral costume, embroidered with green. His carefully dressed hair fell in ringlets on his neck and was fastened quite coquettishly with a knot of ribbon. The slightly starched ruff set off his neck, white as a woman's. His close-shaven chin and face had the faintest bluish shade like the bloom on a peach, a comparison rendered more exact by the ruddy brightness of the delicately rouged cheeks. His teeth, rendered more brilliant by the rouge on the lips, and brushed most thoroughly, sparkled like pearls freshly drawn out of sawdust. His eyebrows had been carefully lined with Indian ink, and another extremely delicate line, running round his eyelids, made his eyes shine with extraordinary brilliancy.

At his appearance a murmur of approval ran round the hall; the ladies bent towards each other, exchanging whispered remarks, and one young lady, but recently returned from her convent school, could not help remarking, with an artlessness that drew down upon her a maternal reproof, "Is n't he lovely?"

This candid maiden had merely expressed the secret opinion of the more discreet of her sex, and not impossibly her mother's opinion also. She blushed deeply

at the reproof, and kept her eyes cast down, though when she thought she was not noticed she allowed them to rest upon Leander.

The most deeply moved of all, undoubtedly, was the masked lady. The quick heaving of her bosom, making the lace upon it rise and fall, the slight trembling of the hand that held the fan, and the fact that she was leaning forward on the edge of the box, so as not to lose any portion of the performance, would have sufficiently indicated the interest she took in Leander, had any one thought of noticing her. Fortunately, every one's attention was turned to the stage, and she had time to recollect herself.

Lygdamon, as everybody knows, for everybody is acquainted with the works of the illustrious George de Scudéry, opens the play with a very touching and pathetic monologue, in which Sylvia's rejected lover discusses the important question of the manner in which he is to put an end to his life, since Sylvia's cruelty makes it impossible for him to remain on this earth. Is he to hang himself or to run himself through with his sword? Or shall he throw himself down from some high rock? Shall he plunge into the river and drown his flame in the flood? He hesitates to

commit suicide, yet knows not what to do. Hope, that springs eternal in the lover's breast, makes him cling to life. Perchance the cruel fair may be softened; perchance his tenacious adoration may incline her to yield. It must be confessed that Leander spoke his lines like a consummate actor, alternately languorous and despairing, and most pathetic indeed. He made his voice tremble as though choked by emotion, and scarcely able to keep back his sobs when he spoke. His sighs seemed to come from the very depths of his heart; he bewailed the cruelty of his love in such gentle, tender, submissive, and moving accents that every woman in the place grew angry with the wicked, hard-hearted Sylvia, and felt quite sure that, had she been in her place, she would not have been so ferociously barbarous as to drive to despair, and perhaps to death, so charming a shepherd.

As he ended his monologue, and while a storm of applause broke out in the hall, Leander cast a glance round upon the ladies in the theatre, letting it linger upon those who he fancied might be of higher rank, for, spite of his numerous disappointments, he had not yet given up hopes of attracting the love of some great lady by his beauty and his talent as an actor. He

noted more than one pair of eyes bedimmed with tears, more than one white bosom heaving with emotion. This merely satisfied his vanity, without causing him the least surprise. Success never does surprise an actor. His curiosity, however, was sharply excited by the masked lady who kept well back in her box. He felt that there was something behind that mystery, and straightway guessed that the mask concealed a passion forced by good breeding to conceal itself. He therefore flashed upon the fair unknown a burning glance intended to apprise her that she was understood.

The glance struck home, and the lady returned it with an almost imperceptible nod, as if to thank Leander for his intelligence. They now understood each other, and whenever the action of the play allowed it, looks were exchanged between them. Leander was a past master in this sort of thing, and knew how to direct his voice and to speak a love passage in such a way that every woman in the place believed it was meant for herself alone.

When Serafina, who played the part of Sylvia, entered, the Chevalier de Vidalinc applauded loudly, and the Duke de Vallombreuse, desirous of aiding his friend's amours, condescended to gently clap his white

hands, the fingers of which were covered with glittering gems. Serafina bowed slightly to the Chevalier and the Duke, and prepared to begin with Lygdamon the pretty dialogue, considered by connoisseurs one of the happiest hits in the play.

As required by her part, she took a few steps on the stage with a preoccupied air, to justify Lygdamon's remark: —

"Now have I surprised you in maiden meditation."

She looked most charming in her nonchalant attitude; her head slightly bent, one hand hanging down, and the other on her waist. Her sea-green skirt, glacéd with silver, was looped up with knots of black velvet; in her hair she wore field-flowers, as if she had picked them unheeding and placed them there without a thought of what she was doing. It was a head-dress that suited her uncommonly well, — better, indeed, than brilliants, although such was not her own opinion; and it was only the fact that her jewel-case was poorly furnished that had compelled her to dress in good taste and to avoid turning a shepherdess into a princess. She spoke charmingly the poetic and flowery lines about roses and zephyrs, the beauty of

the forest and the song of birds, with which Sylvia slyly prevents Lygdamon speaking to her of his love, although the lover turns every image his fair makes use of into a symbol of love and a means of returning to the one thought that fills his mind.

In the course of this scene, Leander, while Sylvia was speaking, cleverly directed a number of sighs towards the mysterious box, and continued to do so until the end of the play, which was greeted with much applause.

No more need be said about a work that is now in every one's hands. Leander's success was complete, and every one felt surprised that so talented an actor had not yet been called to Court. Serafina also had her partisans, and she soothed her wounded pride with the conquest of the Chevalier de Vidalinc, who, though not as wealthy as the Marquis de Bruyères, was young, very much the fashion, and in a fair way of attaining success.

After "Lygdamon and Lydias" the company performed "The Rodomontades of Captain Fracasse," which produced its customary effect and caused unbounded laughter. Sigognac, well coached by Blazius and helped by his natural intelligence, was most de-

lightfully extravagant as the hectoring warrior. Zerbina seemed steeped in light, so brilliant was she, and the Marquis, absolutely carried away, applauded her madly. Even the masked lady had her attention drawn to him by the noise he made. She shrugged her shoulders slightly and a faint smile played upon her lips. Isabella, for her part, was somewhat disturbed by the presence of the Duke de Vallombreuse, who was seated on the right-hand side of the stage, and had she been a less practised actress, the public must have noted the fact. She dreaded his indulging in some insolent outbreak, or some outrageous mark of opposition; but happily her fears proved groundless: the Duke did not attempt to disconcert her by staring at her or annoying her with libertine glances, and when her performance called for applause, his was reserved and discreet. Only, when the action of the play required that Captain Fracasse should submit to slaps on the face, boxes on the ear, and blows from a stick, a singular expression of disdain showed on the young Duke's features, and his lip curled proudly as though he were saying to himself, "Disgusting!" But he did not allow his real feeling to be perceived, and throughout the performance remained indolent

and haughty. Though of violent temper, the Duke de Vallombreuse was far too well bred to allow himself to violate the courtesy due to an adversary with whom he was to fight on the morrow. Until then hostilities were suspended: it was a sort of truce of God.

The masked lady had retired before the second part of the performance was over, to avoid the crowd and to re-enter, unnoticed, the sedan chair which was awaiting her close by. Her disappearance greatly perplexed Leander, who was examining the audience from the wings and following her motions.

Hastily casting a cloak over his shepherd's dress, he hurried towards the stage-door in order to follow the unknown. The slight thread that united him to her would be snapped if he did not make haste; the lady, having emerged from the shadows for an instant, would disappear in the darkness for ever, and the intrigue would come to an end after having scarcely been begun. Yet, although he was breathless on reaching the outside, Leander saw nothing but dark houses and sombre lanes in which glimmered lanterns carried by servants escorting their masters, and the reflection of which quivered in the rain puddles. The

sedan chair, borne by robust footmen, had already turned the corner of a street and had vanished from Leander's impassioned gaze.

"Serve me right for a fool," said he to himself with the frankness men occasionally resort to in moments of crisis; "I ought to have left immediately after the first piece, changed my dress, and awaited the fair unknown at the main door, no matter whether she stayed to see 'The Rodomontades of Captain Fracasse' or not. I am a born idiot, an out and out ass, for not having sense enough to run after a woman of high degree, for I am sure she is one, who makes sheep's eyes at me and turns pale and red under her mask as she watches me on the stage. I deserve never to have for mistresses anything better than sluts and slatterns, kitchen wenches and trulls of that sort."

Leander had got so far in his self-reproaches, when a little page, in brown livery without any galloons, and his hat pulled down over his eyes, suddenly turned up in front of him like a ghost, and said to him in a boyish treble that he tried to deepen so as to disguise its sound:—

"Are you Mr. Leander, who played the part of Lygdamon, the shepherd, in Mr. de Scudéry's piece?"

"I am," replied Leander. "What do you want with me, and what can I do for you?"

"Nothing, thank you," answered the page. "All I have to do is to repeat a message, that is, supposing you care to hear it, from a masked lady."

"From a masked lady!" exclaimed Leander. "Out with it, quick! I am burning with impatience."

"This is it, word for word," returned the page. "'If Lygdamon is as bold as he is handsome, let him be near the church at midnight; he will find a coach waiting for him. Let him get into it and allow himself to be taken along.'"

Ere the astounded Leander had time to reply, the page had vanished, leaving him puzzled to know what he should do; for if, on the one hand, his heart beat high at the thought of a love affair, on the other, his shoulders smarted at the recollection of the thrashing he had received in a certain park, at the foot of the statue of Discreet Love. Might this not be another trap laid for his vanity by some brute jealous of his charms? Might he not find at the appointed meeting-place an irate husband with drawn sword, ready to maul him and cut his throat? These thoughts froze Leander's enthusiasm, for, as I have mentioned,

Leander, like Panurge, feared nothing, save hard knocks and death. Nevertheless, if he failed to profit by the opportunity that presented itself now, so favourably and so romantically, he might never have another, and the dream of his life would never be realised, a dream that had cost him so much in the way of pomades, cosmetics, fine linen, and other bravery. Further, the fair unknown would, if he failed to show up, suspect him of being a coward, a thought too dreadful to be borne and which would inspire courage in the whitest-livered man. It was this unbearable conviction that turned the scales. "And yet," reflected he, "suppose this beauty for whom I am going to run the risk of having my bones broken and being cast into a noisome dungeon, should turn out to be an old dowager, heavily powdered and rouged, and with false hair and teeth? There are plenty lecherous old women, regular ghouls of love, that, unlike graveyard vampires, love to feast on fresh meat. But no! I am sure she is young and attractive, for the little I could see of her neck and bosom was white, rounded, alluring, and holding out the most delightful warranty of what I could not see. Go I shall! Into the coach I get! For nothing is nobler and more aristocratic than a coach, after all."

Having thus made up his mind, Leander returned to the inn, toyed with the supper served to the company, and withdrew to his room, where he got himself up to kill in the most perfect manner he could compass, lavishing on himself embroidered linen, iris powder, and musk. He also buckled on a sword and a dagger; not that they would have proved very efficacious in his inexperienced hands, had occasion arisen for their use, but because a lover armed makes jealous intruders more wary. Then he drew his beaver well down over his eyes, wrapped himself up in Spanish fashion in a dark-coloured mantle, and stepped softly out of the inn, fortunate in not having been perceived by the sarcastic Scappino, who was snoring loud in his room at the other end of the gallery.

The streets were quite deserted, for the good people of Poictiers were given to retiring early, so that Leander did not meet a single living soul, save a few thin-flanked cats prowling around in melancholy fashion, and they, at the sound of his steps, vanished like shadows through an ill-closed door or down a hatchway.

Precisely as the lugubrious sound of the last stroke of midnight drove the owls helter-skelter from the old

tower, he stepped on to the church square. The sinister vibrations of the bell in the silence of night filled Leander's timid soul with secret, religious horror. It seemed to him that the bell was tolling his doom, and for one moment he was on the point of retracing his steps, and prudently returning to his bed at the hotel, instead of launching out into nocturnal adventures. But he saw the carriage waiting at the appointed place, and the little page, the masked lady's messenger, standing on the step and holding the door open. It was too late to retreat, for few people are brave enough to show the white feather before witnesses. Both the boy and the coachman had seen Leander, so the latter approached with an air of determination that concealed the perturbation he felt inwardly, and he entered the coach as intrepidly, to all outward appearance, as Galaor himself.

He had scarcely taken his seat when the driver touched up his horses, which started off at a steady trot. The interior of the coach was plunged in complete darkness, for although it was night, leather curtains had been pulled down in front of the windows and prevented anything being seen outside. The page still stood on the step, and it was utterly useless to try

to make him talk or to get any information from him, for he appeared to be very laconic in his speech and by no means inclined to reveal what he knew, that is, if he did know anything. Leander felt the cushions, which were of velvet pinked with tufts of silk; under his feet was a thick rug, and he breathed in a faint scent of amber given out by the lining of the carriage, a sure sign of elegance and refinement. There was no mistaking the fact that he was being driven to the abode of some lady of quality.

He tried to make out the direction the vehicle was taking, but he was not well acquainted with Poictiers. Nevertheless, he thought he noticed, after a time, that the noise of the wheels no longer echoed against walls, and that they were not crossing gutters constantly. Plainly the coach had issued from the town and he was now being driven into the country, towards some retreat designed for love, — and murder also, thought he, clutching his dagger with a slight shudder, just as though he had been sitting in the dark opposite a blood-thirsty husband or ferocious brother.

At last the carriage stopped; the little page opened the door; Leander got out and found himself in front of a tall sombre wall that he supposed might be the

wall round a park or garden. Presently he managed to make out a door, the cracked, weather-worn, and moss-covered wood-work of which prevented its being at once distinguished from the stones of the enclosure. The page pressed hard upon one of the rusty nails that held the boards together, and the door opened.

"Take my hand, and I shall lead you," said the page. "It is so dark that you could not follow me through the maze of the trees."

Leander obeyed, and the pair walked on for a few minutes through a plantation that, though winter had stripped the trees of their leaves, which crackled under their feet, was still fairly dense. Beyond the wood they entered a flower-garden, the beds in which were bordered with box, and which was adorned with yews clipped into the shape of pyramids, looking, in the darkness, like spectres or sentries, the latter even more terrifying than the former to the timid actor.

After they had traversed the garden, Leander and his guide ascended steps leading to a terrace, on which rose a rustic pavilion, topped with a dome, and ornamented with braziers at the corners. The amorous player noted these details with the help of the faint light that comes from the sky in all open places. The

pavilion might have been thought uninhabited, but for a faint glow that filtered through a thick damask curtain and reddened one of the windows showing against the dark mass of the building.

The masked lady was no doubt awaiting him behind the curtain, and no doubt, also, she too was excited; for in affairs of this kind, women run the risk of losing their characters, and their lives, at times, if it should chance that their husbands hear of the matter and happen to be roughly disposed. But just then Leander was quite free from fear; his vanity blinded him to the danger he was running. The coach, the page, the garden, the pavilion, all these things spoke eloquently of a lady of rank, and the affair had started out in anything but a commonplace manner. He was in the seventh heaven of happiness and seemed to be treading on air. He would have given much to have had the mocking Scappino see him in this glorious moment of triumph.

The page opened a tall glazed door and withdrew, leaving Leander alone in the pavilion, which was furnished with great taste and magnificence. The cupola was painted in imitation of a light turquoise-blue sky, in which floated little rosy cloudlets and Cupids flut-

tered in divers graceful attitudes. The walls were hung with rich tapestries illustrating Honoré d'Urfé's novel, "Astrea." Cabinets inlaid with Florentine gem-stones, arm-chairs upholstered in red velvet and fringes, a table covered with a Turkish carpet, Chinese porcelain vases filled with flowers, notwithstanding the time of year, plainly showed that the lady of the house was wealthy and of high lineage.

Dazzled by the splendour of it all, Leander did not at first notice that the room was empty; he threw off his mantle, which he laid upon a stool together with his hat, touched up in front of a Venice mirror one of his curls the set of which was disarranged, assumed the most gracious attitude he knew of, and said, as he glanced around:—

"Why! where is the goddess of the temple? I see the shrine, but where is the idol? When will she emerge from her cloud, and reveal herself to me, a goddess known by her walk, as Vergil hath it?"

Thus far had Leander proceeded with his amorous inward soliloquy, when a portière of flame-coloured Indian damask was drawn aside, and Lygdamon's masked admirer came in. She still wore her black velvet mask, a fact that worried the actor.

"Can it be that she is ugly? Her fondness for the mask is suspicious," said he to himself.

His fear was soon dispelled; the lady, advancing to the centre of the room where Leander was standing in an attitude of respect, undid the cords of the mask and threw it on the table, revealing, in the light of the tapers, fairly agreeable and regular features, a pair of beautiful, shining brown eyes, blazing with desire, a well-shaped mouth, red as a cherry, with pretty teeth, and a dimple in the chin. Round her face curled rich masses of brown hair that fell upon her shoulders, white and plump, and even ventured to kiss the contours of the breasts that rose and fell tumultuously under the lifting lace that concealed them.

"The Marchioness de Bruyères!" exclaimed Leander in the greatest surprise and with some uneasiness, as he remembered the thrashing he had received. "Is it possible? Am I not dreaming? Dare I believe in such unlooked-for happiness?"

"You are not mistaken, Leander," said the Marchioness, "I am indeed Mme. de Bruyères, and I hope your heart is as quick to know me as your eyes have been to recognise me."

"Your features are engraved on my heart in lines of

fire," answered Leander, passionately. "I have but to look there to behold it adorned with all graces and perfections."

"I thank you for having remembered me so pleasantly," returned the Marchioness. "That proves you have a noble and lofty soul. You must have fancied me cruel, ungrateful, treacherous. Alas! my poor heart is but too tender, and I was far from insensible to the love you showed for me. Your letter, given to a faithless maid, was handed to the Marquis, and he replied to it in the way you know, which naturally misled you with regard to my feelings. Later on, the Marquis, chuckling over what he termed a good joke, made me read that letter, filled with the liveliest and purest love, so that I too might laugh at it. But the result it produced was quite different from that he intended. The feeling I had already for you was increased by it, and I resolved to recompense you for the sorrows you had endured on my account. Knowing that my husband was taken up with his new conquest, I came to Poictiers. Concealed under this mask, I heard you express fictitious love so well that I determined to ascertain whether you could be as eloquent when speaking for yourself."

"Madam," said Leander, kneeling on a cushion at the feet of the Marchioness, who had sunk into an arm-chair, as if overcome by the avowal she had just given utterance to,—"Madam, nay, queen, goddess, rather, what are affected words, counterfeit love, protestations coldly wrought out by poets who bite their nails for very hunger, what are the empty sighs breathed forth at the feet of an actress rouged to the nines and whose inattentive eyes are wandering over the house, what are these by the side of the words that spring from the heart, of a passion that burns to the marrow, of the hyperboles of a love which cannot find in the whole world comparisons brilliant enough for its idol, by the side of the leapings of a heart that would spring from the breast in which it is contained so that it might place itself under the feet of the adored one? You have condescended to say, O celestial Marchioness, that on the stage I make love with warmth; it is because I never look at an actress, and my heart always goes out beyond the footlights, to a perfect ideal, to a lady noble as you, witty as you, beauteous as you; and it is she, and she alone, whom I love under the names of Sylvia, and Doralise, and Isabella, who are but the faint presentments of her."

Thus speaking, Leander, who was much too good an actor to forget that pantomime should accompany delivery, bent over the hand the Marchioness had let him take, and covered it with kisses. She herself caressed the actor's silken, perfumed hair with her long white fingers, covered with rings, and, half-outstretched in her arm-chair, gazed, without noticing them, upon the little winged Cupids in the turquoise-blue heavens above her head. Suddenly she pushed Leander away and staggered to her feet.

"Nay, be done! be done, Leander!" said she, in a quick, breathless way. "Your kisses burn me and make me forget myself."

Supporting herself against the wall, she made for the door by which she had entered, and raised the portière, which fell back behind her and Leander, who had drawn near to assist her.

The winter's dawn was blowing into its red hands to warm them when Leander, carefully wrapped up in his cloak and half-asleep in the corner of the coach, was being driven back to the gates of Poictiers. Happening to raise a corner of the blind in order to see where he was, he caught sight, at a distance, of the Marquis de Bruyères walking alongside of Sigognac and

going to the spot agreed upon for the duel. Leander let fall the leather curtain to avoid being himself seen by the Marquis, whom the coach wheels almost shaved as he drove by. A smile of satisfied vengeance played upon the actor's lips. He had paid the Marquis back for the thrashing!

The spot chosen for the meeting was protected from the wind by a long wall, which had the further advantage of concealing the combatants from the passers-by on the road. The ground was firm, well beaten down, free from stones, humps of earth, and tufts of grass that might trip a man up, and presented, in a word, every convenience to gentlemen desirous of slaying each other in correct fashion.

The Duke de Vallombreuse and the Chevalier de Vidalinc, followed by a barber-surgeon, were not long in coming. The four gentlemen bowed to each other with cold politeness and haughty courtesy, as befitted well-bred men about to fight to the death. The features of the young Duke, who was not only undoubtedly brave, but quite convinced of his own superior skill, expressed absolute indifference. Sigognac, although this was his first duel, looked just as self-possessed. The Marquis de Bruyères was

glad to note the fact, which he took for a good omen.

Vallombreuse threw down his cloak and hat, and took off his doublet, Sigognac imitating him carefully. The Marquis and the Chevalier measured the swords, and ascertained that they were of equal length.

The two principals took their places, received their swords, and fell on guard.

"Fall to, gentlemen, and fight bravely," said the Marquis.

"That recommendation is unnecessary," said the Chevalier de Vidalinc. "They will fight like lions, and the duel will be splendid."

Vallombreuse, who, at bottom, could not help despising Sigognac more or less, and fancied he would meet but a weak foe in him, was startled, on carelessly feeling the Baron's steel, to find a supple and firm blade that diverted his own with wonderful ease. He grew attentive, and tried a few feints that Sigognac at once foiled. The latter's blade flashed into the very smallest opening Vallombreuse gave, compelling him to parry promptly. He ventured on an attack, but his sword, thrown aside by a skilful return, left him uncovered, and but for his bending back quickly, he

would have been run right through the breast. The face of the combat was changing, so far as the Duke himself was concerned. He had imagined he would direct it as he pleased, and had meant, after a few passes, to wound Sigognac with a thrust that had never before failed to carry out his purpose. Now, however, he found out that not only was he unable to attack as he wished, but that he needed to call up all his skill to defend himself. In spite of the efforts he made to keep cool, he was being mastered by his anger; he felt himself becoming feverish and unsteady, while Sigognac, quite impassible, seemed to take pleasure in irritating him by his faultless defence.

"It is a pity to be standing idle while our friends are fighting," said the Chevalier to the Marquis. "It is a cool morning; suppose we take a turn at it ourselves by way of restoring the circulation?"

"With great pleasure," returned the Marquis. "It will take the stiffness from our limbs."

Vidalinc, being a better swordsman than the Marquis de Bruyères, disarmed the latter, after a few lunges, with a sharp and quick turn of the wrist. As there was no bad blood between them, they stopped by com-

mon consent and turned their attention anew to the duel between Sigognac and Vallombreuse.

The Duke, hard pressed by the close play of his adversary, had already retreated several times; he was getting tired and breathed hard. Every now and then the swiftly clashing blades flashed forth sparks, but the return to the attack became weaker and weaker. Sigognac, having tired out his adversary, was now lunging and thrusting and compelling him to fall back.

The Chevalier de Vidalinc turned pale and began to fear for his friend. It was evident to any one who knew anything of fencing that the advantage lay wholly with Sigognac.

"Why the devil," muttered Vidalinc, "does not Vallombreuse try on the thrust taught him by Girolamo of Naples, and which that Gascon cannot possibly know?"

As if he had read in his friend's mind, the young Duke resorted to the famous thrust, but at the very moment when he was about to straighten out with a cut-over Sigognac got in before him and lunged so straight and true that his blade pierced clean through the Duke's fore-arm. The pain of the wound forced

the young Duke to relax his fingers, and his sword fell to the ground.

With perfect courtesy Sigognac stopped at once, although he was entitled to follow up his thrust under the terms of the engagement, for the duel was not to stop with the drawing of first blood. He rested the point of his weapon on the ground, put his left hand on his hip, and seemed to await his adversary's pleasure. But Vallombreuse, whose sword had been restored to him by Vidalinc, on an approving nod from Sigognac, proved unable to retain his hold of it and signed that he gave in.

Whereupon Sigognac and the Marquis de Bruyères bowed most politely to the Duke de Vallombreuse and to the Chevalier de Vidalinc, and started back for town.

X

A HEAD AT A WINDOW

THE Duke de Vallombreuse was carefully seated in a sedan-chair, his arm having been dressed by the surgeon and then put in a sling. The wound, though it would prevent his using his sword for some weeks, was not dangerous, the blade having merely traversed the fleshy part of the arm without injuring artery or muscles. It was painful, of course, but his pride was much more sorely hurt; the slight contractions of his features, due to the twinges he felt, were followed by an expression of concentrated wrath, and at such times he tore at the velvet lining of the chair with the fingers of his remaining hand. More than once, during the return to his mansion, he put his head out of the window and rated the porters, who, nevertheless, were walking along as steadily as possible and selected the smoothest ground in order to avoid jolting him. Their precautions did not prevent the wounded man calling them brutes and promising

them they should be soundly thrashed for chucking him up and down as if he were salad in a basket.

When he reached home he refused to go to bed, and lay down propped up with cushions in an invalid-chair, his feet covered with a silken counterpane fetched by Picard, his valet, who was startled to see his master returning wounded, — a most unusual occurrence, seeing that the Duke was such an expert swordsman.

Seated on a stool by his friend's side, the Chevalier de Vidalinc administered to him every fifteen minutes a spoonful of the cordial ordered by the surgeon. Vallombreuse remained silent, but it was plain that he was inwardly boiling with anger, in spite of his affected calmness. At last his wrath vented itself in violent language: —

"Can you understand, Vidalinc, how that lanky plucked stork, flown from its ruinous tower to avoid starving to death, managed to run me through with its long bill? I, who have fought the keenest swordsmen of the day and have always come away without a scratch, leaving behind me some fine fellow swooning and turning up his eyes in the arms of his seconds!"

"The most skilful and the luckiest have their off days," replied Vidalinc sententiously. "Dame Fortune

does not always look at men in the same way; sometimes she smiles and sometimes she frowns. Until today you have had no reason to complain of her, for she has petted you like a favourite child."

"Is it not shameful," continued Vallombreuse, growing more excited, "that a ridiculous buffoon, a grotesque country bumpkin, who gets thrashed and slapped upon the boards in low farces, should have got the better of the Duke de Vallombreuse, hitherto unbeaten? I believe he is a professional swashbuckler disguised as an acrobat."

"You are aware of his real rank, vouched for by the Marquis de Bruyères," answered Vidalinc. "Nevertheless I own that his unparalleled skill with the sword amazes me, for I know of no one comparable to him. Neither Girolamo nor Paraguante, the celebrated fencing-masters, have greater closeness of sword play. I watched him very narrowly while you were engaged, and I came to the conclusion that he is more than a match for our most famous duellists. It needed all your skill and the results of the Neapolitan's teaching to prevent your being dangerously wounded. Your defeat is really a victory, for Marcilly and Dupontal, who claim to know something about fencing, and who are reck-

oned among the best swordsmen in Paris, would unquestionably have been laid out by such an adversary."

"I long to have my wound heal," resumed the Duke after a moment's silence, "so that I may challenge him again and take my revenge."

"That would be a dangerous undertaking you had better keep clear of," said the Chevalier. "Your arm might still be a little weak, and your chances of victory would be diminished by so much. Sigognac is a formidable adversary, whom it would not be wise to provoke imprudently. He now knows your style of fighting, and the confidence derived from his first success will make him doubly formidable. Honour is satisfied now; the fight was serious: be content with that."

Vallombreuse could not help acknowledging to himself the truth of these remarks. He had studied fencing sufficiently, and he fancied he excelled in the art, to know that his point, skilful as he was, would never reach Sigognac's breast, defended as it was by an impenetrable guard against which his every effort had proved futile. Though it made him indignant, he nevertheless was compelled to recognise Sigognac's astonishing superiority. He was even constrained to own to himself that the Baron, desiring not to kill him, had

wounded him in a manner that rendered him helpless. This piece of magnanimity, which would have touched a less proud character, irritated his self-love and embittered his resentment. The mere idea of having had the worst of the encounter maddened him, and though he apparently acquiesced in the line of conduct recommended by his friend, it was not difficult to make out, from his sombre and grim air, that a dark purpose of vengeance was already working out in his brain, but that it needed to be nursed by hatred in order to secure its success.

"A pretty figure I shall cut before Isabella," said he with a forced laugh, — but he was laughing on the wrong side of his mouth, — "now that I have had my arm skewered by her gallant. Crippled Cupid does not have much success with the Graces."

"Forget the ungrateful girl," said Vidalinc. "After all, she could not foresee that a Duke would take it into his head to fall in love with her. Go back to poor Corisande, who loves you with all her soul and who spends hours weeping at your doors."

"Do not name that woman if you want to remain friends with me," cried the Duke. "Such base love, that no outrage can drive away, disgusts and irritates me. What I want is haughty coldness, rebellious pride,

unattackable virtue. The disdainful Isabella appears to me the more adorable and charming. I am really grateful to her for rejecting my love, that would no doubt be a thing of the past already had she accepted it. Assuredly she cannot have a low and common spirit, when she can repel, in her condition of life, the advances of a nobleman who pays her attentions, and who is not half bad-looking, if the ladies of this city are to be believed. My love for her is mingled with a certain respect that I am not accustomed to feel for women. But how am I to get that damned lordling, that accursed Sigognac, whom the devil fly away with, out of the way ? "

" It will be no easy matter," said Vidalinc, " for he is now on his guard. Then even if we succeeded in getting rid of him, there would still remain Isabella's love for him, and you know better than any one, for you have often suffered from it, the obstinacy of women in such matters."

" If I can only kill the Baron," went on Vallombreuse, unmoved by the Chevalier's arguments, " I shall soon master the girl, in spite of her affectation of prudery and virtue. No one is more speedily forgotten than a dead lover."

Vidalinc was of a different opinion, but he did not deem it wise to enter upon a discussion of the subject, as it would merely excite still further Vallombreuse's irritable temper.

"Get well first, and we shall discuss the matter afterwards. All this talk is tiring you; try to take some rest and not to worry. If I do not see to it that you are kept quiet in mind as well as body, the surgeon will blame and scold me for not doing my duty as nurse."

The wounded man saw the force of the remark, kept silence, closed his eyes, and ere long dropped off to sleep.

Sigognac and the Marquis de Bruyères had quietly returned to the inn, where, like discreet gentlemen, they did not breathe a word about the duel. But walls, which are said to have ears, have eyes also, and can see at least as much as they hear. Though the place selected for the duel was apparently a lonely one, the progress of the fight had been followed by more than one inquisitive pair of eyes. In the idleness of provincial life there are plenty of these invisible or unnoticed flies that manage to buzz around places where anything is happening, and fly off afterwards to spread the news of it everywhere. By breakfast time the whole of Poic-

tiers was already aware that the Duke de Vallombreuse had been wounded in a duel with a stranger. Sigognac, living very quietly at the inn, had exhibited to the public his mask only, not his face. This fact piqued curiosity, and every one's imagination was busily engaged in the attempt to discover the victor's name. It would serve no purpose to record the amazing suppositions that were indulged in. Each man and woman laboriously wrought out one for him or herself, and supported it with the most frivolous and ridiculous arguments, but to no one did the preposterous notion occur that the real victor was the Captain Fracasse who had excited such roars of laughter the day before. A duel between a nobleman of the Duke's rank and a strolling player would have been so unprecedented and so amazing an affair that not a soul suspected the real fact. Many of the people of quality in the place caused inquiries to be made after the Duke's health at his residence, reckoning on the customary indiscreetness of the servant tribe to obtain some clue, but the Duke's people proved as reticent as mutes in a seraglio, for the very good reason that they knew nothing whatever.

The wealth, the haughty pride, the beauty, and the success of Vallombreuse, where women were con-

cerned, had excited considerable jealousy and hatred, that dared not, however, manifest themselves openly, but that were gratified by his defeat. This was the first time he had been beaten, and every one whom he had offended by his arrogance rejoiced at his being hurt in his tenderest spot, his self-love. They dilated, though they had not seen the man, upon the courage, the skill, and the proud port of the Duke's adversary. The ladies, who all, more or less, had reason to complain of the Duke's conduct towards them, for he was one of those vile priests who defile the altar on which they have burned incense, were enthusiastic in their praises of the man who had avenged their secret wrongs. They would gladly have crowned him with bays and myrtle, save and except the tender-hearted Corisande, whom the news of the Duke's wound drove nearly distracted, and who went weeping through the streets. Although she incurred the risk of being harshly turned away, she succeeded in forcing her way into the mansion, though she did not manage to see the Duke, who was too well guarded; but the Chevalier de Vidalinc, kinder and more sympathetic, took the greatest pains to reassure the unhappy woman, who was far more concerned for the ungrateful nobleman than he deserved.

A HEAD AT A WINDOW

All the same, as there is nothing hid on this sublunar and terraqueous earth but that it will out, it was learned from Master Bilot, who had it from James, the Marquis's man, who had heard the conversation that had taken place at Zerbina's supper between his master and Sigognac, that the unknown hero, who had wounded the Duke de Vallombreuse, was undoubtedly Captain Fracasse, or rather a Baron who had joined Herod's company of strolling players in order to follow the woman he loved. As for the Baron's name, James had forgotten it; it ended in "gnac," a termination common enough in Gascony, but as to the gentleman's rank he was positive.

This true and romantic story made a great sensation in Poictiers. Every one became deeply interested in so brave and so skilful a nobleman, and when, as Captain Fracasse, he stepped on to the stage, prolonged applause testified, even before he had said a word, to the popularity he had won. A number of the ladies of the very highest rank did not hesitate, even, to wave their handkerchiefs; and Isabella herself was applauded in more sonorous fashion than usual, so that she was almost upset and blushed under the rouge that covered her cheeks. She did not interrupt herself, however,

and acknowledged the favourable reception given her with a modest curtsey and a graceful bow.

Herod rubbed his hands with delight, and his big colourless face shone like the full moon, for the house was crammed and the cash-box like to burst with the plethora of coin, every one being eager to see the famous Captain Fracasse, actor and gentleman, whom neither cudgels nor swords dismayed, and who had not hesitated, as a valorous champion of the fair, to stand up to a duke who inspired terror in the bravest hearts. Blazius, on the other hand, considered that this great success was rather an omen of trouble, for he feared, and not without reason, the Duke's vindictive temper, and felt sure the latter would soon find a way to revenge himself and pay off his old scores against the company. Earthen crocks, he said, ought to avoid contact with iron pots, even though they might have come off unscathed in the first rub, for metal is harder than clay. Whereat Herod, trusting to the support of Sigognac and the Marquis, called him a poltroon, a lily-livered fellow, and a dastard.

Had not the Baron been genuinely in love with Isabella, he might have easily been unfaithful to her more than once, for many a beauty smiled most

tenderly upon him, notwithstanding his burlesque costume, his vermilion nose and his ridiculous part, which did not encourage romantic illusions. Even Leander's success was endangered by him; in vain the latter showed off his leg, swelled out like a bantam pigeon, twisted his curls round his fingers, paraded his solitaire ring and smiled till he showed his gums; he had ceased to attract notice, and he would have been maddened by spite, had not the masked lady been in her box, never taking her eyes off him, and answering his glances with taps of her fan on the edge of the box and other similar signs of intelligence. His recent success in love poured balm upon the slight wound to his self-love, and the pleasures the night promised consoled him for not being the star of the evening.

The players returned to the inn, and Sigognac escorted Isabella to her room, into which, contrary to her habit, the young actress allowed him to enter. The maid lighted the candles, put wood on the fire, and then discreetly withdrew. When the door had closed, Isabella took Sigognac's hand and pressed it with more force than one would have supposed her frail and delicate fingers could exert. Then in a voice filled with deep emotion, she said: —

"Swear you will never again fight a duel on my behalf. Swear it, if you love me as truly as you say you do."

"I cannot take such an oath," replied the Baron, "for if any insolent fellow should fail in respect to you, I shall certainly chastise him, be he duke or prince."

"Remember," urged Isabella, "that I am only a poor actress, exposed to be insulted by any one. The world's opinion, too fully justified, alas! by the morals of our profession, holds that every actress is also a courtesan. Once a woman has stepped on to the boards, she belongs to the public; eager glances take in every one of her charms and scrutinise her beauty, and imagination seizes upon her as if she were every one's mistress. There is no man who, because he knows her, but thinks he is known to her, and if he gains admission behind the scenes, straightway shocks her sense of decency by declarations she is innocent of having provoked. If she remains respectable, her virtuous conduct is reputed to be mere affectation or the outcome of calculation. We have to put up with these things, since we are powerless to change them. You may henceforth trust to my repelling by my reserve, my short speech, my icy looks the impertinence

of lords and cads and fops of all sorts who bend over my dressing-table or knock, between the acts, at the door of my room. A sharp rap with a busk upon fingers that are making too free is every whit as good as a thrust of your rapier."

"You must allow me to believe, charming Isabella," said Sigognac, "that an honourable man's rapier may well back up, at times, an honest woman's rap with a busk, and I beseech you not to deprive me of the post of your knight and champion."

Isabella still held Sigognac's hand in hers, and kept her blue eyes, full of an expression of caress and supplication, fixed upon him in order to induce him to make the promise she desired. But the Baron was wholly deaf to her mute entreaties, and intractable as a hidalgo on the point of honour. He would have braved a thousand deaths rather than suffer any one to fail in respect to the woman he loved, and was resolved that Isabella on the stage should be as highly honoured as a duchess in her own drawing-room.

"Come, promise," said the young actress, "not to run such risks again, and for so poor a reason. I cannot tell you in what anguish and anxiety I was plunged until your return, for I knew you had gone to fight

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the Duke, of whom every one speaks in accents of terror. Zerbina had told me the whole story. It was wicked of you to torment me so. You men do not bestow much thought on women when your pride is involved: you go on without hearing our sobs or noting our tears; deaf to everything, blind and ferocious. Do you know that I should have died had you been slain?"

And the tears glittered in Isabella's eyes at the mere thought of the danger run by Sigognac, and the trembling of her voice attested the sincerity of her words.

Moved beyond all expression by Isabella's genuine love, Baron de Sigognac put his arm round her waist, drew her unresistingly to his breast, and touched with his lips the girl's forehead, whose panting bosom he felt close to his.

They remained thus silent for a few moments, in an ecstasy that a less respectful lover than Sigognac would have taken advantage of; but the latter would have scorned to profit by her chaste forgetfulness of herself, due as it was to grief.

"Console yourself, dear Isabella; not only am I not dead, but I have even wounded my adversary, excellent

Moved beyond all expression by Isabella's genuine love, Baron de Sigognac put his arm round her waist, drew her unresistingly to his breast, and touched with his lips the girl's forehead, whose panting bosom he felt close to his

swordsman though he be," said he tenderly and playfully.

"I know that your heart is stout and your hand steady," returned Isabella, "and I love you, and am not afraid to tell you so, for I know that you will respect my frankness, and not take advantage of it. When I saw how sad and lonely you were in that Poverty Hall of yours where you were wasting your youth, I felt filled with tender, sorrowful pity for you. Happiness does not attract me; its brightness makes me shy. Had you been happy, you would have frightened me away. In your little garden, when we were walking through it you pushed the brambles aside for me, you plucked for me a little wild rose, the only gift it was in your power to make. I dropped a tear upon it before putting it into my bosom, and there and then, unknown to you, I gave you my heart in exchange."

As he listened to these sweet words Sigognac strove to kiss the lovely lips that uttered them, but Isabella freed herself from his clasp without repellent prudery, but with the modest firmness that a well-bred man never opposes.

"Yes, I love you," she went on, "but not as other women love. It is your fame that I cherish, not

myself that I seek to satisfy. I am quite willing to be believed your mistress, since that is the only way of explaining your being with us. Little do I care for what may be said of me provided I retain my own self-respect and know that I remain virtuous. A single stain would kill me. No doubt it is the noble blood that flows in my veins that inspires me with such pride, —very ridiculous, is it not, in an actress? — but I cannot help it."

Timid though Sigognac was, he was young also. The sweet avowal that would not have surprised a fop, filled him with delicious intoxication and moved him most deeply. His usually pale cheeks flushed suddenly; waves of fire passed before his eyes; the blood surged into his buzzing ears and he felt his heart beat so fast as almost to choke him. He undoubtedly believed in Isabella's virtue, but it occurred to him that with a little audacity he might overcome her scruples, and he remembered having heard that an opportunity once missed never returns. The girl stood before him in all the splendour of her beauty, radiant, luminous, as it were, a soul made visible, an angel standing on the threshold of the paradise of love. He stepped toward her, and clasped her in his arms with convulsive ardour.

Isabella did not attempt to struggle, but, bending backwards to avoid the young man's kisses, fixed upon him a look full of grief and reproach. From her lovely blue eyes sprang tears, pearls of chastity, that ran down her suddenly blanched cheeks to Sigognac's lips; a stifled sob shook her frame, and she sank down as if about to swoon.

The terrified Baron laid her in an arm-chair, and kneeling before her, took hold of her hands, implored her forgiveness, blaming himself for his outbreak due to the fire of youth, to a moment of madness which he bitterly repented, and for which he would atone by the most absolute submission.

"You have caused me much pain," sighed Isabella at last. "I had such complete confidence in your sense of honour. The avowal of my love for you ought to have been sufficient, and the very outspokenness of it should have made you understand I would not yield to you. I had supposed you would allow me to love you in my own way without alarming my affection by coarse desires. You have yourself destroyed that feeling of security. I still trust your word, but I no longer dare listen to my love. And yet it was so sweet to see, to hear you, to read your thoughts in your eyes. It was

your sorrows I longed to share, leaving to others to share your joys. Among all those low, dissolute libertines, I was wont to say to myself, 'There is one man who does believe in chastity and knows how to respect the woman he loves.' I, a mere actress, had indulged in the dream of exciting a pure love, even while relentlessly pursued by odious gallantries. All I hoped to do was to lead you to the threshold of happiness, and then to vanish again in the shadows. You can see for yourself that I was not too ambitious."

"Adorable Isabella," cried Sigognac, "every word you utter makes me feel the more deeply my own unworthiness. I misjudged your angelic heart, and I ought to kiss the very ground you tread upon. But fear nothing henceforth as far as I am concerned; the husband shall restrain the lover's fire. I have but my name, unstained and blameless like your own self; I offer it to you, if you will deign to accept it."

Sigognac was still on his knees before the young girl. As he spoke, she bent down towards him, and seizing his head in her hands in a passion of love, printed a swift kiss upon the Baron's lips; then, rising, she took a few steps.

"You shall be my wife," said Sigognac, intoxicated

by the contact of her lips, that were as blooming as a flower, and that burned him like fire.

"Never, never," returned Isabella in great excitement. "I shall show myself worthy of such happiness by refusing it. Oh! dear friend, my soul is in ecstasy! You do respect me, then? You would really take me with uplifted head into the rooms where hang the portraits of your ancestors; into the chapel where stands your mother's tomb? Did you do so, I should not fear to face the eyes of the dead from whom nothing is hid, and the virgin's wreath would be meet ornament for my brow."

"What!" exclaimed the Baron, "you say that you love me, and yet you will have none of me as either lover or husband?"

"You have offered me your name, and that is sufficient for me. I return it to you, after having kept it for one moment in my heart. For one passing instant I shall have been your wife, and I shall never belong to any other man. While I was kissing you, I was consenting all the time in my heart, but I have no right to enjoy so much happiness on earth. It would be a great mistake in you, dear friend, to clog your fortunes by marrying a poor actress like me, who would always

have her stage life cast up in her teeth, respectable and pure though that life has been. The cold looks and averted faces with which women of rank would receive me would hurt you, and the more that you would be unable to challenge the wretches to a duel. You are the last of a noble race, and it is your duty to restore your house, smitten by adverse fate. When with a tender glance I induced you to leave your home, all you thought of was a possible love affair. That was natural enough, but I, anticipating the future, I thought of something very different. I saw you returning from court, richly dressed, and appointed to some high office. Sigognac resumed its former splendour; in my thoughts I tore the ivy from the walls, I restored the fallen stones, I repaired the broken sashes, I regilded the faded storks on your escutcheon, and having led you to the boundaries of your domains, vanished with a sigh."

"Your dream shall come true, noble Isabella, but not quite as you have dreamed it, for the ending would be far too sad. You shall be the first, your hand in mine, to cross the threshold from which the brambles of neglect and ill fortune shall have been cleared away."

"No, no; it shall be a beautiful, high-born, and rich heiress, worthy of you in every respect, whom you will be able to present with pride to your friends, and of whom no one shall be able to say, 'I hissed her, or I applauded her at such and such a place.'"

"It is cruel to drive one to despair by being at once so adorable and so perfect," said Sigognac. "It is wicked to open heaven to a man and straightway to close it in his face. But I shall overcome your resolve."

"You would attempt it in vain," returned Isabella; "it is unchangeable; I should despise myself if I forsook it. You must perforce be satisfied with the purest, the truest, the most devoted love that ever filled a woman's heart, but you must not ask for more. It is a dreadful thing, is it not?" she added with a witching smile, "to be adored by an *ingénue* whom many have the bad taste to consider charming. Why, Vallombreuse himself would be proud to be so loved!"

"To give one's self and to refuse one's self so absolutely! No other woman than you could have thought of such a contrast as the mingling of the sweet and the bitter in the same cup."

"I know that I am a strange girl," answered Isabella.

"I take after my mother in that respect, but you must have me as I am. If you should persist or torment me, I should know how to take refuge in some asylum where you could never find me; so that settles the matter. And now, as it is growing late, retire to your room and alter the lines in this play, which we are to perform soon, and which suit neither my face nor my character. I am your dear friend; be my poet."

While speaking, Isabella took from a drawer a roll tied with a pink ribbon and handed it to Baron de Sigognac.

"Now kiss me and go," she said, holding out her cheek to him. "You are going to labour for me, and the labourer is worthy of his hire."

When he had withdrawn to his room Sigognac remained long a prey to the emotion aroused in him by the scene he had just passed through. He was at once wretched and delighted, radiant and gloomy, in the seventh heaven and in the lowest confines of hell. He alternately laughed and wept, torn by the most tumultuous and contradictory feelings. The joy of being beloved by so beautiful a woman uplifted him, while the certainty that his love was hopeless overwhelmed him with deepest sorrow. But little by little his excitement

passed away, and he cooled down. He recalled every word Isabella had spoken, and commented upon it, and the picture of the restored castle of Sigognac which she had evoked presented itself to his heated imagination in the brightest and liveliest colours. Still awake he had a sort of vision.

The façade of the castle shone white in the sunshine, and the regilded vanes glittered against the azure sky. Peter, wearing a rich livery and standing between Beelzebub and Miraut under the gate with the escutcheon, was awaiting his master. From the long disused chimneys rose the smoke in joyous whirls, indicating that the mansion was filled with a numerous retinue and that abundance reigned in it once more.

He beheld himself — attired in a dress as handsome as it was in good taste, the lace and embroidery on which shimmered and sparkled — leading towards his ancestral home Isabella, who wore the robes of a princess, covered with arms the blazonry of which appeared to designate one of the most illustrious families in France. A ducal coronet flashed upon her brow, but she did not appear to be in the least exalted on that account. She still had her own tender and modest look, and carried in her hand Sigognac's gift,

the little rose, which was yet blooming in spite of the lapse of time, and the scent of which she breathed in as they walked along.

As the young couple drew near the castle, an old gentleman of the most venerable and majestic aspect, whose breast was covered with the stars of several orders, and whose face was utterly unknown to Sigognac, came out a short distance from the porch as if to greet the newly wedded pair. The Baron was most surprised, however, to see standing by the old gentleman's side a youth of proud port, whose features he failed at first to make out, but who ere long appeared to him to be the Duke de Vallombreuse. The young man had lost his haughty expression and was smiling upon him with much friendliness.

The tenants were shouting "Long live Isabella! Long live Sigognac!" and manifesting the liveliest delight. Amid the tumult of the acclamations was heard the blast of a hunting-horn, and soon there emerged from a thicket into the clearing, a huntswoman who was punishing her recalcitrant horse, and whose features were uncommonly like Yolande's. She patted her horse's neck, compelled it to adopt a quieter pace, and passed slowly in front of the manor house.

Sigognac could not help following with his glance the fair rider, whose velvet skirt blew out into the shape of a wing, but the more intently he looked at her, the more did she pale and thin out. The figure became of ghost-like transparency, and through its blurred contours portions of the landscape were visible. Yolande was fading away like a faint remembrance in the real presence of Isabella; true love was dispelling youth's early dreams.

In that ruinous mansion, where the eye beheld naught but desolation and wretchedness, had the Baron led his gloomy, sleepy, dull life, himself becoming more like a shadow than a man, until the day of his first meeting with Yolande on the moors where she was hunting. Until then the only women he had seen were peasants tanned by the sun, and mud-bespattered shepherd girls; females, not women. Consequently he was dazzled by the sight of Yolande de Foix as men are dazzled when they stare at the sun. Even when he closed his eyes there passed before them that radiant form which seemed to belong to another world. Yolande, it must be owned, was incomparably beautiful, and well fitted to fascinate men more used to feminine beauty than a poor country gentleman riding a thin-

flanked nag and wearing his father's old clothes that were too large for him. But the smile which his grotesque accoutrement called forth made Sigognac realise instantly that it would be ridiculous in him to entertain the least hope of winning the love of the haughty beauty. He therefore avoided meeting her, or else contrived to look at her from the safe shelter of a hedge or the trunk of a tree upon the roads she was in the habit of riding along, accompanied by her escort of admirers, whom Sigognac, with characteristic self-abasement, thought every one abominably handsome, marvellously dressed, and superbly amiable. On such days he would return to his rookery his heart filled with sadness and bitterness, wan, discomposed, and cast down, like a man after a great sickness, and remain sunk in silence for hours at a time, seated by the fireside, his chin resting in his hand.

Isabella's visit to the castle had crystallised that vague need of love which troubles youth, and which fastens upon chimeras in idleness. The grace, the gentleness, and the modesty of the young actress had gone straight to Sigognac's heart, and he was actually very deeply in love with her. She had healed the wound inflicted upon him by Yolande's contempt.

Sigognac, having indulged for a time in these visionary fancies, took himself to task for his idleness, and succeeded, not without difficulty, in riveting his attention upon the play Isabella had intrusted to him for the purpose of making some alterations in it. He cut out lines that did not accord with the young actress' appearance, and added others; he re-wrote the hero's declaration of love, which appeared to him to be cold, affected, pretentious, and smacking of euphuism. The one he substituted for it was unquestionably more natural, more passionate, and more fiery, for in fancy he was himself speaking the words to Isabella.

The work kept him busy until late in the night, but he completed it in a way that satisfied him and did him credit, and the next day he was repaid for his trouble by a sweet smile from Isabella, who straightway set to learning the lines altered by her poet, as she called him. Neither Hardy nor Tristan could have done better than had Sigognac.

That night the house was fuller even than on the preceding evening, and the porter at the door was nearly crushed in the jam of spectators who were all trying to get in at the same time, fearing, though they had paid for their seats, that there would be no room

left. The reputation of Captain Fracasse, victor over the Duke de Vallombreuse, was rapidly growing and attaining tremendous proportions. Indeed, his admirers were not far from crediting him with having performed the labours of Hercules and the great deeds of the twelve knights of the Round Table. A number of young gentlemen, hostile to the Duke, proposed to make friends with the valiant swordsman and to invite him to a carouse at a tavern, at six pistoles apiece, while more than one lady was busy composing love letters to him, in the most amorous strain, and had torn up half a dozen unsatisfactory attempts. In a word, he was all the rage, and every one swore by him. He himself was by no means pleased with a success that prevented his remaining unknown, but he could not escape from it; he simply had to put up with it. For one brief instant he did dream of hiding and not showing up on the stage, but when he thought of the despair into which he would thus plunge the Tyrant, who was simply in ecstasies over the enormous receipts he was taking in, he gave up the notion. The worthy players, who had come to his help in his state of misery, had a right to benefit by the unexpected vogue that had come to him. So, resigning himself to

play his part, he buckled on his belt, draped his cloak over his shoulder, and waited to be summoned by the call-boy.

As the money was flowing in and as the houses were large, Herod, like a generous manager, had doubled the number of lights, so that the place was as brilliantly illuminated as a Court theatre. With the object of fascinating Captain Fracasse, the ladies of Poictiers had dressed themselves to kill; *in fiocchi*, as they say in Rome. Not a diamond had been left in the jewel-cases, and the brilliants sparkled and scintillated upon more or less white bosoms, upon more or less pretty heads, animated by the liveliest desire to attract.

A single box, that occupying the best position, and the most easily seen from all parts of the house, remained empty, and people glanced inquiringly in that direction. The apparent indifference of the people who had taken it surprised the nobility and the town's-people, who had been in their places for more than an hour past. Herod, peeping through the half-parted curtain, appeared to be waiting the arrival of the careless persons before giving the signal for the raising of the curtain, the regulation three knocks on the floor.

And indeed nothing is more disagreeable than the late and disturbing arrival of spectators, who move their chairs about, settle down noisily and distract the attention of the house.

Just as the curtain was rising, a young lady entered the box, and a nobleman of venerable and patriarchal appearance sat down beside her. Long silvery locks, the ends of which curled, framed in the old gentleman's face, while the top of his skull resembled ivory. His face had the ruddy colour that betokens a life spent in the open air, and suggests a certain Rabelaisian devotion to the bottle. His eyebrows, which were still black and thick, shaded a pair of eyes the brightness of which had been in no wise diminished by age, and which flashed at times out of their brown ring of wrinkles. Mustaches and a chin tuft, to which the epithet, "claw-like," which the old *chansons de geste* invariably use in reference to Charlemagne's beard, might have been applied, curled around his thick lipped, sensual mouth, while a double chin connected his face and his fat neck. His general appearance, therefore, would have been rather common, had not his expression redeemed it, and left no doubt as to the rank of the personage. A collar of Venice point lace fell over

his gold brocade doublet; his linen, dazzlingly white and covering a fair sized corporation, overflowed at the waist and covered the upper part of his tan coloured velvet trunk. A cloak of the same colour, trimmed with gold braid and put on carelessly, hung in folds on the back of the chair. It was quite evident that the old gentleman was an uncle playing the part of chaperon, and reduced to the condition of a duenna by his niece, whom he adored in spite of her capricious ways. As one looked at the pair of them, they might have been a slender and lissome Diana, leading by a leash an old half-tamed lion, sluggish and sulky, that would rather have gone on sleeping in its den than be carted round the place, and yet nevertheless allowed itself to be dragged round.

The dress of the young lady herself proclaimed by its elegance the rank and wealth of the wearer. A gown of glaucous green, a shade that only fair women quite sure of their complexion dare wear, set off the snowy whiteness of her chastely uncovered bosom, while her neck, of alabaster translucence, sprang, like a pistil from the corolla of a flower, from out a starched open-worked ruff. The skirt, of silver tissue, shimmered in the light, and brilliant points

Yolande and her uncle, Captain Fracasse, striding along with outstretched legs, had stalked down to the foot-lights with the most outrageous and insulting mien that can be imagined. Frantic applause broke out all over the house on the entrance of the favourite actor, and for a time no one paid any attention to Yolande.

Sigognac was certainly not conceited, and his aristocratic pride made him contemn the profession of strolling player which cruel necessity had compelled him to embrace; yet I would not swear that his self-love was not pleasantly tickled by the warm and noisy greeting he received. The popularity of actors, gladiators and pantomimists has at times excited the jealousy of men in high places, of Roman emperors and Cæsars, masters of the world, who deigned to contend, on the arena or on the stage, for the crowns offered to singers, mimes, wrestlers, and drivers, although they possessed already numbers of them, as witness Ahenobarbus Nero, to mention the most famous of them only.

When the clapping had ceased, Captain Fracasse cast over the house that glance which no actor fails to indulge in with a view to ascertaining whether the spectators are numerous, and whether the audience is disposed to merriment or severity, so that he may

modify his own performance in accordance with the indications he notes, and take or avoid liberties.

All of a sudden the Baron felt dazzled; the lights grew to the size of suns, and then seemed to stand out black against a luminous background. The faces of the spectators, whom he could faintly make out below him, were lost in a sort of mist; hot perspiration, that at once turned icy cold, broke out over him from head to foot; his legs gave way, and he felt as though he had sunk into the floor up to the belt. His mouth felt dried up and parched; an iron collar appeared to clasp his neck like a Spanish garrote, and the words he had to speak came forth bewildered, tumultuous, tumbling over and mixing up with each other like birds hurrying out of an open cage. At one fell blow he had lost his coolness, his self-mastery, and his memory. It was just as though he had been smitten by an invisible thunderbolt, and he came within an ace of tumbling over the footlights. The reason was that he had just caught sight of Yolande in her box, in all the splendour and assurance of her beauty, looking at him with her lovely bluish-green eyes.

O shame! O horror! O most unkind cut of fate! O hap most painful to a noble soul! Here was he,

beheld in grotesque costume, engaged in the low and derogatory occupation of diverting the rabble with his grimaces, by a girl so haughty, so arrogant, so disdainful that he would have loved to humble her and to break her pride by the performance of mighty deeds, heroic performances, superhuman feats only! And here he was, unable to vanish, to disappear, to sink into the bowels of the earth!

For one instant he bethought himself of fleeing, of plunging head first through the backdrop, but his feet were loaded with the leaden soles that, it is said, runners are in the habit of wearing in order to acquire greater lightness. He could not move, and remained bewildered, stupid, open-mouthed, to the great astonishment of Scappino who, supposing that Captain Fracasse had forgotten his lines, was prompting him in a whisper.

But the public imagined that the actor was waiting for a second round of applause before beginning, and started to clap, stamp, and make the most tremendous row that ever was heard within a theatre, thus enabling Sigognac to recover himself. He exerted his fullest powers of will, and abruptly regained complete control of himself.

"Let me at least enjoy the reward of my shame," said he to himself, as he steadied his trembling limbs. "A pretty thing it would be to be hissed in her presence and showered with apple-cores and rotten eggs. Then she may not have recognised me under this abominable mask, for who, indeed, would imagine that it is a Sigognac who is rigged out like a performing monkey in this red and yellow striped dress. Come, let me pull myself together, and be a man! I shall play like the very devil, and if I do well, she will applaud me; that, by my faith, will be a triumph worth earning, for she is hard enough to please."

All this passed through Sigognac's mind in less time than it takes to write it, for the pen can never travel as rapidly as thought. Meanwhile he was spouting his great tirade with such strange bursts of voice, such unexpected intonations, and so tremendously comic a fury that the house broke out into a storm of applause, and Yolande herself, although it was plain she cared not for that sort of thing, could not keep back a smile. Her uncle, the stout Commander, was wide-awake, and clapping his gouty hands to show his satisfaction. The unfortunate Sigognac, driven to despair, seemed, by the exaggeration of his performance, the wildness of

his buffoonery, and the absurdity of his rodomontades, to make sport of himself and to be bent on drinking the bitter cup of his fate to the very dregs, casting under foot his dignity, his rank, his self-respect, the remembrance of his ancestors, and trampling upon them with fierce, delirious joy.

"Now, surely, must thou be satisfied, O adverse Fate," said he to himself, as he felt himself slapped, boxed on the ears, and kicked. "Now am I assuredly brought low enough, and sunk deep enough in contempt. Thou hadst made me wretched, and now thou dost make me ridiculous! By thy vile tricks thou dost compel me to dishonour myself in the presence of that lovely girl! What more dost thou desire?"

At times his anger overmastered him, and he rebelled against Leander's blows with so threatening and dangerous a look that the latter fell back terrified, but Sigognac, quickly recalling the spirit of his part, would take to trembling in every limb; his teeth chattered, his legs gave way, he stuttered and stammered, and exhibited, to the intense delight of the audience, every sign of utter cowardice.

This extravagant performance, that would have been out of place in any less wildly comic part, was at-

tributed by the public to the skill of the actor, who had evidently entered fully into the spirit of his part, and it proved most effective. Isabella alone had divined the cause of the Baron's emotion; it must be the presence in the audience of the insolent woman whose features had remained deeply imprinted in her memory. While she played, she cast occasional glances at the box where sat enthroned, in the calm, disdainful pride of a beauty conscious of her powers, the proud fair whom, in her humility she did not even venture to call her rival. She took bitter pleasure in assuring herself of Yolande's unquestionable superiority, and owned that no woman could hope to rival such a goddess. Yolande's dazzling beauty enabled her to understand the insensate love at times excited in common people by the unparalleled grace of some young queen beheld in a triumphal entry or other public function,—a love entailing madness, imprisonment, and death.

Sigognac had made up his mind not to look at Yolande, lest he should be overcome by sudden emotion, lose his memory, and make a show of himself on the stage. He did his best to control himself by keeping his eyes fixed, when the action of the play allowed him to do so, upon gentle Isabella. Her sweet face, marked

by a touch of sadness, due to the fact that in the play a cruel father sought to make her wed the man she disliked, quieted him; her love consoled him for the contempt of Yolande, and he drew from it renewed self-esteem that enabled him to go on with his part.

His torture at last came to an end; the play was over. But when Sigognac, who felt himself choking, took off his mask behind the scenes, his comrades were struck by the strange change in his features; he was absolutely livid, and dropped as if lifeless upon a bench that happened to be near. Blazius, seeing his condition, brought up a flagon of wine, saying that there was nothing better in such cases than a long drink of good liquor, but Sigognac signed that it was water only he wanted.

"A very bad thing," said the Pedant; "a serious error in diet. Water is fit only for frogs, fish, and teal, and is wholly unsuited to men. If apothecaries knew their business, they would write on the outside of carafes, 'For External Use Only.' Why, I should expire on the spot if I were to swallow a single drop of the tasteless stuff."

Notwithstanding the objections raised by Blazius, Sigognac drank down a whole jug of water, the cool-

ness of which entirely restored him, and made him look less wild than before.

"You played admirably and most comically," said Herod, approaching the Captain. "But it is unwise to play so hard, as you soon would break down. The comedian's art consists in taking care of himself and presenting the appearance of things only. He should be cool even when apparently given over to hottest excitement, and remain self-possessed when seemingly maddened with wrath. Never did any one incarnate so perfectly as you have just done the character of a Swashbuckler, with its magniloquence, its impertinence, and its craziness; and could you but repeat the effects you improvised to-day, you would bear away the palm as a comic actor."

"Ay, I did indeed play the part to the very life, did I not?" said the Baron bitterly. "I felt I was uncommonly idiotic and comical in the scene in which my head goes through the guitar with which Leander hits me."

"I must own," answered the Tyrant, "that your expression just then was the most utterly laughable and angry, at one and the same time, that any man could imagine. Mlle. Yolande de Foix, who is so beautiful,

proud, noble, and serious, actually condescended to smile. I saw her myself."

"A great honour for me, assuredly," said Sigognac, flushing, "to have entertained that beauty."

"Forgive me," said the Tyrant, noting the blush; "I forgot that the success which intoxicates us poor strolling players must necessarily be indifferent to a person of your rank, who cannot care for applause, no matter how illustrious its source."

"I am not offended, dear Herod," returned Sigognac, holding out his hand, "for a man should always do his best. But I could not help reflecting that in my youth I had dreamed of very different triumphs."

Isabella, who had been dressing to take part in the next piece, passed near Sigognac before going on, and cast upon him a consoling angel's glance, so full of tenderness, sympathy, and love, that it made him forget wholly and immediately both Yolande and his feeling of unhappiness. It acted upon him like a heavenly balm and healed the wounds of his pride; for a moment at least, such wounds being apt to re-open and to bleed anew.

The Marquis de Bruyères was in his place, and although very busy bestowing applause upon Zerbina

during the performance, he did not fail to call upon Yolande in her box, for he was acquainted with her and occasionally joined her on her hunting parties. Without naming Sigognac, he related to her the duel with the Duke de Vallombreuse, as he was better able than any one to do, since he had acted as second to one of the combatants.

"There is no need of being so discreet," answered Yolande, "for I had no difficulty in guessing that Captain Fracasse is Baron de Sigognac. You must remember that I saw him start from his old ruin in company with the wench, the gipsy girl who plays the parts of *ingénues* with such maidenly reserve," added she with a somewhat forced laugh; "and then he was at your place in the society of these people. I should scarcely have supposed from his rather stupid looks that he was so excellent a mummer and so doughty a fighter."

While chatting with Yolande, the Marquis looked round the hall, which he could now see better than from the seat he usually occupied close by the orchestra, and whence he could more easily follow Zerbina's performance. His attention was attracted by the masked lady, whom he had not hitherto seen, naturally enough,

since, his seat being in the front row, he turned his back upon the spectators, whose attention he did not particularly care to draw upon himself. Although she was closely wrapped up in black lace, it struck him that there was something in the mysterious lady's figure and attitude that dimly recalled his wife the Marchioness.

"It can't be," he said to himself; "she is at Bruyères, where I left her."

Then he noticed that she wore upon the ring finger of the hand which she coquettishly rested upon the edge of the box, as if to compensate herself for having to remain masked, a rather large solitaire diamond which the Marchioness was in the habit of wearing. This fact somewhat upset him, and he took his leave of Yolande and her uncle with the object of making sure he was not mistaken. Quickly, however, though he repaired to the box, he found the bird flown when he entered. The lady had taken fright and bolted. And very much put out and disgusted was he, though he piqued himself on taking such matters in very philosophical fashion.

"Can she be in love with that fool Leander?" said he to himself. "Well, I have fortunately had the fellow soundly thrashed beforehand, and so far I am all right."

Soothed by the thought, he went behind the scenes to join Zerbina, who was surprised at his delay, and who received him with the affected ill-temper that sort of woman uses to allure men with.

After the performance, Leander, troubled by the fact that the Marchioness had left so suddenly during the performance, hastened to the church square, where the page was wont to await him with the coach. He found the page alone, and was handed by him a letter together with a small and very heavy box. Having done this, the boy vanished in the darkness so quickly that, but for the fact of the letter and packet being in his hands, the actor might well have disbelieved his senses. Calling a lackey, who was passing with a lantern in his hand, on his way to seek his master in a neighbouring house, Leander hastily broke the seal with a trembling hand, and holding the paper close to the lantern which the man lifted for the purpose, read the following: —

"DEAR LEANDER, — I am very much afraid my husband recognised me at the play, in spite of my mask. He stared at me so hard that I withdrew quickly in order not to be caught. Prudence, the foe of love, dictates

that we should not meet at the pavilion to-night. You might be watched, followed, killed perhaps. I say nothing of the dangers I might run myself. Until more favourable and convenient opportunity offers, pray wear the gold chain which my page will hand you. I hope that whenever you put it on, you will think of her who will never forget you and who will ever love you. This from her who, to you, is only MARY."

"And so farewell to my romance!" said Leander to himself, as he gave a coin or two to the lackey who had lighted him. "A pity, too! Ah! you lovely Marchioness, my love for you would have proved lasting; but the jealous fates would not permit it. Fear nothing, Madam; I shall not compromise you by indiscreet manifestations of my passion. That brutal husband of yours would murder me pitilessly, and plunge his steel into your white bosom. No, there must be none of those bloody scenes, better adapted to the tragic stage than to every-day life. At the cost of breaking my heart, I shall not seek to see you, and I shall be content with kissing this chain, less fragile and heavier than the bond that has united us for a moment. I wonder how much it is worth? A thou-

sand ducats, at the least, I should say from its weight. Well, it shows I am right to love the great only. The only trouble it entails is that you run the risk of being cudgelled or run through. On the whole, this intrigue has come to an end just at the right time; I have no reason to complain."

And being anxious to see his chain flash and gleam in the light, he returned to The French Arms in a fashion that was remarkably collected for a lover who had just received his dismissal.

When Isabella returned to her room, she found on the centre of the table a casket so placed as to forcibly attract attention. A folded paper was placed under one of the corners of the box, which evidently contained something precious, being itself very costly. The paper was not sealed and contained these words, written in a shaky handwriting, the letters having been traced with difficulty by a crippled hand: "For Isabella."

A flush of anger rose to the actress' cheek at the sight of the gift, which would have caused many a virtuous woman to waver. She did not even gratify her feminine curiosity by opening the casket, but called in Master Bilot, who had not yet gone to bed, having to prepare a supper for a number of lords, and told him

to take the box away and return it to the person who had sent it, for she would not tolerate its remaining in her room another minute.

Boniface pretended to be greatly astonished, and swore by all that was holy, an oath as binding upon him as the oath by the Styx was upon the dwellers in Olympus, that he did not know how the casket had got there, though he could make a shrewd guess as to where it came from. In this he spoke the truth, for it was dame Leonardo whom the Duke had approached, being of opinion that an old woman will succeed where even the devil himself can do nothing, and she it was who had sneaked in and laid the jewels on the table while Isabella was out. But this time the damnable female had bargained to do more than she could accomplish, having trusted too much to the corrupting power of gems and gold, a power that affects base souls only.

"Take the thing out," said Isabella to Bilot. "Return the abominable box to whomsoever it belongs, and above all, do not breathe a word of the matter to Captain Fracasse. Although I am wholly blameless, he might become angry and break out in a way that would injure my character."

A HEAD AT A WINDOW

Master Bilot admired the disinterestedness of the young actress, who had not condescended to glance, even, at gems that would have turned a duchess' head, and who sent them back contemptuously as if they were plaster-of-Paris sweets or empty nut-shells. He withdrew, bowing as respectfully as to a queen, so taken aback was he by such virtue.

Greatly agitated and troubled, Isabella, after Bilot had gone, opened the window to cool her cheeks and brow in the night air. Through the branches of the trees she could see a light shining in the dark front of Vallombreuse House, no doubt in the room of the wounded Duke. The lane appeared to be deserted, yet Isabella, endowed with the keen hearing of an actress, thought she heard some one whisper very softly, "She has not yet gone to bed."

Startled by this, she bent forward a little and thought she could make out, at the foot of the wall, in the shadow, two human forms, cloaked, and motionless as stone statues in a church porch. At the other end of the lane she perceived, in spite of the darkness, a third figure apparently on watch.

Seeing that their presence was detected, the mysterious beings disappeared, or concealed themselves more

carefully, for Isabella neither saw nor heard anything more. Tired of watching, and believing she had been deceived by her senses, she gently closed her window, shot the bolt of her door, placed the light at her bedside, and lay down, a prey to a strange, undefined anxiety which all the reasoning she indulged in failed to allay. For, indeed, what could she have to fear in an inn full of people, close by her friends, and in a room the door of which was duly and carefully locked and bolted? What possible connection could there be between herself and the shadows she had got a glimpse of at the foot of the wall, and that were no doubt cut-purses awaiting a victim and bothered by the light in her room?

All these reasons were very sound, but they failed to reassure her, and she was oppressed with dreadful presentiments. But for the fear of being laughed at, she would have risen and taken refuge with one of her companions; Zerbina, however, was not alone, and Serafina did not like her, while she felt an instinctive repugnance for the duenna. She therefore remained a prey to indescribable terror. The slightest cracking of the woodwork, the faintest sputtering of the candle, the unsnuffed wick of which was charring, startled and

drove her to shelter under the sheets, terrified lest she should see some monstrous shape in the dark corners of the room. Then she would regain her courage, and look round the chamber to find there was nothing suspicious or unnatural about it.

In the upper portion of one of the walls was cut a round window, no doubt for the purpose of lighting a dark closet. It showed on the gray wall, in the faint gleam of the light, like a huge black Cyclopean eye spying on the young girl. Isabella could not keep her eyes off the dark, deep cavity, which was barred with an iron grating in the form of a cross. There was nothing to be feared on that side, certainly, yet at one time Isabella fancied she saw a pair of human eyes shining in the shadow there.

Ere long a brown face, with long, dishevelled hair, was passed through the narrow space between two of the bars; next a pair of shoulders, that were somewhat bruised by the grating, and then a little girl eight or ten years of age, clutching the edge of the opening, stretched herself out as far as she could down the wall, and dropped to the floor as noiselessly as a feather or a snow-flake.

Isabella remained motionless, petrified and stiff with

terror, so that the child imagined she was asleep; and when she drew near to ascertain whether the young lady's sleep was sound, her brown features expressed the liveliest surprise.

"The Necklace lady!" she exclaimed, fingering the pearls which rustled round her thin brown neck. "The Necklace lady!"

At the same time Isabella, half dead with terror, had recognised the little girl she had met at the Inn of the Blue Sun, and again on the road to Bruyères in company with Agostino. She tried to call for help, but the child put her hand on her mouth.

"Do not call, you run no danger; for Chiquita told you she would never cut the throat of the lady who gave her the pearls she wanted to steal."

"But what are you doing here, child?" asked Isabella, who recovered some of her courage at the sight of the weak and sickly girl, who not only could not possibly be very dangerous, but, besides, evidently felt a sort of strange and wild gratitude.

"I came to push back the bolt you shoot every night," answered Chiquita, very quietly and as if wholly unaware that there was anything reprehensible in the act. "I was picked out to do it because I am

as slippery and slender as an eel. There are very few holes I cannot get through."

"And why did they want to have the bolt pushed back? To rob me?"

"Oh! no," replied Chiquita, with a disdainful air. "It was to let the men get into your room and carry you off."

"The Lord have mercy upon me! I am lost!" exclaimed Isabella with a moan, and clasping her hands.

"No, you are not," returned Chiquita; "for I shall leave the bolt fast. They will not venture to break in the door, for that would make a noise; the people of the inn would be roused and the men would be caught. They are not quite such fools."

"I would have screamed, clung to the walls, and made myself heard."

"A gag stops all shouting," said Chiquita, with the pride of an artist explaining the tricks of his trade to an ignoramus, "and a blanket wrapped round the body, all kicking. It 's the easiest thing in the world. The stable-boy was bribed, and he was to open the back-door."

"Who devised that wicked plot?" asked the poor actress, shuddering at the peril she had run.

"The nobleman who gave the money, oh! lots of money; like that, as much as your two hands could hold," returned Chiquita, whose eyes blazed with fierce covetousness. "But it does not matter; you gave me the pearls. I shall tell the men you were not asleep, that there was a man in your room, and that the trick has failed. That will make them go off. Let me look at you; you are beautiful, and I love you. Yes, I love you almost as much as Agostino. Why!" said she, observing the knife found in the wagon, "there's the knife I lost; it was my father's knife. Keep it, it is good steel.

"'For the bite of the snake
Is no remedy known.'

"You see, all you have to do is to turn the ferule this way, and then stab this way, upwards, for the blade goes in deeper. Put it in your bosom, and if ever naughty men want to take liberties with you, you can rip them up," said the child, illustrating her remarks with appropriate gestures.

As she listened to the lecture on the art of using a knife, delivered at night, under such strange circumstances, by a wan-faced and half-crazy thief of a child, Isabella felt as if oppressed by a nightmare.

"Take a good grip of the knife with your fingers; there, like that. No one will hurt you now. So good-bye, I 'm off. Good-bye, and don't forget Chiquita!"

Then Agostino's little accomplice placed a chair against the wall, climbed upon it, rose on tiptoe, caught hold of the iron bar, braced herself, and pressing her feet against the wall with a quick movement, she speedily reached the edge of the round window, through which she vanished humming a sort of prose ditty: —

"Chiquita can go through keyholes, and she can dance on the tops of railings and broken bottles without hurting herself. It will take a sharp one to catch her."

Isabella lay awake until daybreak, which she awaited impatiently, for she could not sleep, so thoroughly had she been upset by the occurrences of the night. She was not, however, further disturbed; but when she came down the next morning to the dining-room, her comrades were startled by her pallor and the deep circles round her eyes. She was assailed with questions, and related her nocturnal adventure. Sigognac, maddened, proposed nothing less than attacking the residence of the Duke de Vallombreuse, whom he regarded as the instigator of the rascally attempt.

"In my opinion," said Blazius, "we ought to lose no time in folding up our tents, and losing, or saving ourselves rather, in the ocean of Paris. Matters are looking bad round here."

The players adopted the Pedant's advice, and the start was fixed for the morrow.

XI

THE PONT-NEUF

IT would be long and tiresome to follow the successive stages of the players' chariot on its way to Paris, the great city. They had no adventures worth mentioning on the way; the common purse was well filled, and they could afford to proceed at a round pace, having the means to hire good horses and to push on. The company stopped at Tours and Orléans, in each of which places they gave a number of performances, the receipts from which amply satisfied Herod, who, as manager and treasurer, thought more of pecuniary than of artistic success. Blazius was regaining confidence and beginning to smile at the thought of the terror the Duke de Vallombreuse had inspired him with by his vindictive character. On the other hand, Isabella still trembled when she remembered the unsuccessful attempt to carry her off; and although she slept in the same room as Serafina, she more than once saw in her dreams Chiquita's wild,

haggard face grinning at her with its row of shining teeth out of a dark window. Terrified by the vision, she would cry out and awake; her companion in such cases finding it very difficult to get her quieted. Sigognac did not give outward signs of anxiety, but he always slept fully dressed in the room nearest that of the girls, his sword under his pillow in case of a night alarm. By day he generally went on foot ahead of the chariot, to make sure the road was clear, especially when there were bushes, thickets, walls, or ruined huts that might conceal an ambuscade. When he caught sight of a suspicious-looking group of travellers, he would fall back upon the chariot, to which the Tyrant, Scappino, Blazius, and Leander formed a very respectable escort, even though of the two latter the one was old and the other timid as a hare. At other times, like a wise general who takes care to anticipate the tricks of the enemy, he walked behind the chariot, for the peril might just as well come from that quarter. All these precautions, however, proved needless and supererogatory, for the company was not once attacked; either because the Duke had not had time to arrange for a dash upon the actors, because he had given up his fancy, or because the pain of his wound told on his courage.

THE PONT-NEUF

Though it was winter the season proved mild. Well fed, and having taken care to provide themselves with warm clothing of thicker stuff than the serge of which stage mantles are made, the players did not suffer from the cold, and the north wind merely brought to the cheeks of the young actresses a livelier rose-flush than usual, and at times caused it to extend to their pretty noses. These winter roses, though a little out of place, by no means spoiled their looks, for everything is becoming to lovely women. As for dame Leonardo, neither wind nor storm could produce any effect upon her complexion, worn as it was by forty years' service.

At last, at about four in the afternoon, they arrived close to the great city, on the Bièvre side; they crossed the footbridge over that stream, and proceeded along the bank of the Seine, most illustrious of rivers, whose waters have the honour of laving the palace of our kings and many more buildings renowned the world over. The smoke ascending from the chimneys of the houses formed a great bank of reddish, semi-transparent fog on the horizon, and behind this bank the sun was going down, a red, rayless globe. Against the back-ground of dull light stood out the violet-coloured mass

of the private, public, and ecclesiastical buildings which filled in the prospect on this side. On the other bank of the river, beyond Louviers Island, were seen the Arsenal and the Celestine monastery, and more nearly opposite, the point of Notre-Dame Island. But once they had passed through the Saint Bernard gate, they enjoyed a magnificent spectacle. Notre-Dame rose in front, seen from the east, with its apse and the mighty flying buttresses, looking like the backbones of giant fish, its two square towers, and the light spire at the intersection of the nave and transepts. Other less lofty spires told of other churches and chapels set within the maze of houses, and jutted out black against the luminous band in the heavens. It was the Cathedral, however, that most attracted Sigognac's attention, for he had never before been in Paris, and the vast size of the building astounded him.

Accustomed to the everlasting loneliness of the moors and to the deathly silence of his old ruinous castle, he was dazed and deafened by the rumbling of the carts laden with goods of all kinds, the numbers of horsemen and pedestrians who crowded the river bank and the streets into which the chariot every now and then drove by way of making a short cut, and by the calls

and cries of the multitude. He felt as if a mill-wheel were spinning round in his head, and he walked with unsteady gait like a drunken man.

Presently the delicately traceried spire of the Sainte-Chapelle, flushed with the tints of sunset, shot up above the roofs of the Palace of Justice. Lights came out here and there and dotted the sombre façades of the houses with little red sparks, while the river reflected all these flashes and lengthened them out like serpents in its dark waters. Then in the growing obscurity, along the quay, became visible the church and cloister of the Augustinian monks, and on the platform of the Pont-Neuf, on his right, Sigognac perceived the dim outline of an equestrian statue, that of the good King Henry IV., but the horse and its rider soon vanished from sight as the chariot turned the corner of the Rue Dauphine, newly laid out through the convent property.

There was in the Rue Dauphine, near the Dauphine gate, a large hostelry where occasionally put up embassies come from strange, unknown countries, and which was capable of accommodating a numerous company without previous intimation of its arrival. There was always fodder in the mangers for the animals, and travellers never failed to secure beds. This was

the place Herod had fixed upon as a suitable camping ground for his theatrical tribe. The satisfactory condition of the exchequer warranted this indulgence, which, besides, served a useful purpose, inasmuch as it vouched for the respectability of the company and betokened that it was no mere band of vagabonds, swindlers, and debauchees, driven by hard necessity to take up the wretched profession of strolling players, but a troupe of honest actors whose talent enabled them to earn a handsome living; which is quite a possible case, as is proved by the reasons set forth by Master Pierre de Corneille, the famous poet, in his play "The Comic Illusion."

The kitchen into which the players entered until their rooms had been prepared, was large enough to accommodate comfortably Gargantua or Pantagruel and their guests. On the huge fireplace blazed, crackled, and roared great logs, making the chimney look like the mouth of Hell in the great Douai play. On several spits, ranged one above another, and turned by a dog tearing round inside a wheel like one possessed, were roasting strings of geese, pullets, and capons; quarters of beef were browning, loins of veal were cooking, besides partridges, snipe, quails, and other small birds. A

scullion boy, half baked himself and streaming with perspiration, though clad merely in a linen jacket, kept pouring gravy over the victuals with a long ladle that he plunged into the dripping-pan as soon as he had emptied it, — a piece of work as hard as that of the Danaïds, for the gravy he ladled up at once ran back.

Round a long oak table, covered with dishes in various stages of preparation, bustled an army of cooks, carving-men, and sauce-makers, who handed to their assistants the meat larded, trussed, and spiced, to be put into the ovens which, incandescent with live coals and crackling with sparks, resembled Vulcan's forge more than culinary ovens, while the cook-boys themselves looked like Cyclops in the fiery vapour. On the walls glittered a tremendous array of kitchen ware in copper and tin : boilers, stewpans of different sizes, fishpans, in which leviathans might have been set in to simmer in wine and herbs, pastry moulds in the shape of donjons, domes, diminutive temples, helmets, and turbans of Saracenic aspect, — in a word, all the offensive and defensive weapons that are to be found in the arsenal of the god Gaster.

And all the time rushed in from the pantry stout servant-maids, with blowzy red cheeks, such as

Flemish painters put into their pictures, who bore on their heads or rested on their hips baskets full of provisions.

"Hand me the nutmeg!" cried one man. "Give me cinnamon!" shouted another. "This way with the spice-box! Let us have salt in the cellar! Nutmegs! Bay leaves! A very thin slice of bacon, please! Blow up that fire, it is not burning properly! Put out that one, or everything will be burned up like chestnuts forgotten on the stove! Pour some gravy into that soup! Water for the brown sauce, it is getting too thick! Whip those whites of egg smartly, they are not coming up properly! Dust that ham with bread crumbs! Take that gosling off the spit; it is done to a turn! Smartly there, take off that beef; it must be just underdone! Leave the veal and the chickens, for —

"'Underdone veal and ill-cooked chick
Fill the graves with dead men thick.'

"Remember that, my lad. It is not every man who can become a cook; it is a gift of heaven. Carry that soup to number 6. Who has ordered quails with bread-crumb-crust? Dish up quickly that larded saddle of hare!"

In this lively, noisy fashion were exchanged terms of good cheer and words of fat eating that better deserved to be so called than the frozen ones Panurge heard when the Polar ice thawed, for they all referred to some dish, condiment, or delicacy.

Herod, Blazius, and Scappino, who were each and all remarkably fond of good living and as dainty as an old devotee spinster's cat, licked their chops as they listened to this sort of eloquence, so rich, so succulent and so marrowy that they loudly declared it to be preferable to that of Isocrates, Demosthenes, Æschinus, Hortensius, Cicero, and other babblers, whose phrases are but empty food, void of medullary juice.

"I feel like kissing that stout cook on both cheeks," said Blazius. "He is as fat and paunchy as a monk, and bosses all his saucepans in royal fashion. Never did hero face fire more splendidly than he."

Just as a servant came to inform the players that their rooms were ready, a traveller entered the kitchen and drew near the fireplace. He was a man some thirty years of age, tall, slight, athletic, with regular but repulsive features. The fire lighted up his profile, while the rest of his face was lost in shadow. The touch of light brought out a prominent eyebrow, under

which flashed a hard, inquisitive eye; an aquiline nose, the end of which hooked over a thick mustache; a very thin lower lip merging at once into a thick, short chin, as if nature had not had the wherewithal to complete his face. The neck, that rose above a starched plain linen cravat, was thin and showed markedly the cartilage which old women account for by saying that it is a piece of the fatal apple stuck in Adam's throat, which his descendants have never yet managed to swallow. His dress consisted of an iron-gray cloth doublet fastened with hooks and eyes over a buff jerkin; of brown trunks and felt boots coming up above the knees and wrinkling over his legs. Many mud-stains, some dry, others still fresh, proved he had ridden far, and the blood-stained rowels of his spurs testified that the horseman had been compelled, in order to finish his journey, to use them remorselessly upon the flanks of his weary steed. A long rapier, the iron shell-hilt of which weighed a full pound, was suspended by a broad leather belt, fastened with a brass buckle, and drawn tight round the fellow's thin waist. A dark-coloured cloak which he had thrown upon a settle, together with his hat, completed his costume. It was difficult to say exactly to what class he belonged; plainly he was

neither merchant, citizen, nor soldier. It was most likely that he was some poor member of the inferior aristocracy, of the sort who turn retainers to some great lord and attach themselves to his fortunes.

Sigognac, who cared not for things culinary to the extent that Herod or Blazius did, and who was not absorbed in the contemplation of the alluring victuals, examined attentively the tall rascal, whose face he thought he knew, although he could not remember where or when he had come upon him. He racked his memory in vain; he failed to find what he wanted. Yet he was conscious that it was not the first time he had come across the mysterious individual, who, objecting to the inquisitorial examination to which he was being subjected, turned his back upon the people in the kitchen and bent over the fireplace under pretext of warming his hands.

As his memory played him false, and as his persistent curiosity might have given rise to a needless quarrel, the Baron followed the actors, who took possession of their respective rooms, and, after having dressed a bit, assembled in a lower room in which the supper had been served, and did justice to the fare like hungry and thirsty men that they were. Blazius smacked his

lips and pronounced the wine good, pouring himself out many a bumper, but not forgetting to replenish his comrades' glasses, for he was no selfish toper paying court to Bacchus in solitude, and he was almost as fond of making others drink as of drinking himself. The Tyrant and Scappino drank glass for glass with him, but Leander was afraid, if he indulged too largely, of spoiling the fairness of his complexion and adorning his nose with grog blossoms, an ornament by no means desirable in one who played lovers' parts. Sigognac had practised temperance for so many years in his home, that he had acquired a Castilian habit of sobriety which he found it extremely difficult to depart from. Besides, his mind was filled with the thought of the fellow he had seen in the kitchen, and who struck him as being a suspicious character, although he could not have said why, for after all there was nothing out of the way in the arrival of a traveller at a frequented inn.

The meal was a lively one; excited by wine and good cheer, glad to have reached Paris at last, the Eldorado of all people with plans to carry out, enjoying the warm temperature of the room after the long hours spent in the cold in the chariot, the players indulged in

the wildest hopes. They rivalled, in imagination, the actors of the Hôtel de Bourgogne and of the Théâtre du Marais; they already beheld themselves applauded and made welcome, called to Court, ordering plays from the leading wits of the day, treating poets contemptuously, invited to entertainments given by great lords, and ere long driving in their own carriages. As for Leander, he was dreaming of conquests in the highest ranks of society, and scarcely condescended to stop short at the Queen. He had not drunk wine, but he was intoxicated with vanity. Since his affair with the Marchioness de Bruyères, he really thought himself irresistible, and his conceit knew no bounds. Serafina had made up her mind to remain faithful to the Chevalier de Vidalinc only until a richer and greater man should come along. Zerbina, having her Marquis, who was to join her, formed no plans, and dame Leonardo's age put her out of the question, for all she could do was to act as messenger; she therefore wasted no time on all this nonsense and ate steadily. Blazius kept filling her plate and her glass with burlesque rapidity, the old lady taking the joke in very good part.

Isabella had long since finished, and was dreamily engaged in moulding a piece of bread into the shape

of a dove, while casting on her beloved Sigognac, seated at the other end of the table, glances filled with chaste love and angelic tenderness. The warmth of the room had flushed her cheeks, but now wan from the fatigue of the day's journey, and she was so adorably beautiful that if the young Duke de Vallombreuse had seen her then, his passion for her would have been excited to madness.

Sigognac, also, was gazing upon Isabella with respectful admiration, for the noble sentiments of the girl moved him as deeply as her numerous charms, and he regretted that she should have refused to marry him through excess of sensibility.

When the meal was ended, the women withdrew, as did also Leander and the Baron, leaving the trio of confirmed topers to finish the partially emptied bottles, a performance that did not commend itself to the servant whose business it was to bring in the liquor; but a tip, in the shape of a silver coin, consoled him for the loss of his perquisites.

"Barricade yourself carefully in your room," said Sigognac, as he escorted Isabella to the door of her apartment. "There are all sorts of people in inns such as this, and you cannot be too careful."

"You need not fear for me, Baron," replied the young actress. "There is a triple lock on my door that would answer for a prison gate, besides a bolt as long as my arm. The window is grated, and there is no round sash with its dark orifice in the wall. Travellers often carry with them valuables that tempt the cupidity of thieves, and consequently their rooms must be secure. Never was fairy princess, threatened with a spell, safer in her dragon-guarded tower."

"Sometimes spells fail," returned Sigognac, "and the enemy manages to enter in spite of phylacteries, tetragrams, and cabalistic formulæ."

"Only when the princess, weary of being shut up, although for her own good, favours the foe through curiosity or love; but such is not my case. Therefore, while more timid than a doe that hears the sound of the horn and the baying of the pack, I am not afraid; and you ought to feel secure, for you are brave as Alexander and Cæsar. Go to bed, and sleep soundly."

And by way of good-night, she held out to Sigognac a slender, soft hand which, as well as any duchess, she knew how to preserve white by the use of talc powder, cucumber paste, and prepared gloves. After she had

entered her room, Sigognac heard the key turn in the lock, the latch fall in the hasp, and the bolt creak in most reassuring fashion. Just as he was stepping into his own room, however, he saw on the wall, in the light of the lantern that lighted up the passage, the shadow of a man whose approach he had not noticed, and who almost brushed by him. It was the stranger he had remarked in the kitchen, and who, no doubt, was on his way to the room assigned him by the host. There was nothing out of the way in that, yet Sigognac, pretending he could not find the keyhole in his door, watched the suspicious character, whose appearance so greatly troubled him, until he disappeared round a corner. The noisy closing of a door, heard all the more loudly in the silence that had now fallen upon the inn, informed him that the stranger had reached his apartment, which evidently lay in a distant part of the house.

Not feeling sleepy, Sigognac sat down to indite a letter to the worthy Peter, as he had promised he would do on reaching Paris. He took care to write in a very legible hand, the faithful servant not being much of a scholar and unable to do much more than spell out print. The letter read as follows : —

THE PONT-NEUF

"My good Peter, — Here am I in Paris at last, where, I am told, I shall make my fortune and restore my decayed house, although I own I do not see how I am going to accomplish these things. However, some fortunate chance may enable me to get to Court, and if I am lucky enough to get speech of the King, the fountainhead of all favours, His Majesty may prove willing to take into account the services rendered by my ancestors. The King will surely not suffer that a noble family that ruined itself in the wars, should die out so wretchedly. In the meantime, for lack of other means of support, I have taken to play-acting, and I have succeeded, in this way, in earning a few pistoles, some of which I shall send you when I find a safe mode of doing so. I should perhaps have done better to enlist as a soldier in some company, but I did not wish to part with my freedom of action, and, besides, poor as a man may be, it is unpleasant for him to have to obey, when his ancestors have always commanded, and he himself has never taken orders from any one. Then, too, my solitary life has rendered me somewhat unsociable and independent.

"The only adventure I have had on my long trip has been a duel with a very wicked duke, a great swords-

man, but, thanks to your excellent teaching, I came out of the business covered with glory. I ran the fellow through the arm, and I could easily have killed him, for he is not as good at defence as at attack, being fiery rather than prudent, and quick rather than steady. He gave me more than one opening, and I could have despatched him with one of those irresistible lunges you taught me so patiently in our prolonged matches in the lower hall at Sigognac, the only place the floor of which was capable of standing the stamping, and where we killed time, limbered up our arms, and tired ourselves out in order to be sure to sleep. Your pupil did you honour, and I gained immensely in the respect of the public after that victory, which was really too easily won. It would seem that I am actually a first-class swordsman, in the very first flight of gladiators. But enough on this point.

"I often think, in spite of the distractions that fill my new mode of life, of the poor old place which is falling into ruins upon the tombs of my family, and in which I spent my melancholy youth. From this distance it does not appear as sad and gloomy as it did then. Indeed, there are times when I traverse in

thought its deserted halls, look at the portraits yellowed by age that were so long my only companions, crushing under foot a piece of a broken pane, and I take a sort of melancholy pleasure in these reminiscences. How I should delight in seeing again your kind old face, tanned by the sun and illumined at my approach by that cordial smile of yours! And, there is no reason why I should blush to say it, I would give much to hear once more the purring of Beelzebub, the barking of Miraut, and the neighing of poor Bayard, who was wont to collect all his failing strength to carry me along, light weight though I was. Do these dear animals still love me? Do they seem to remember me and to regret me? Have you managed, in that habitation of poverty, to keep them from starving to death, and to spare a little of your own meagre pittance for them? Do try, all of you, to keep alive until I return, whether in poverty or in wealth, happy or desperate, so that we may all end our lives together, as fate may will, in the place where we have suffered in company. If I am to be the last of the Sigognacs, God's will be done! There is yet a vacant place for me in our ancestral mortuary chapel.

"BARON DE SIGOGNAC."

The Baron sealed his letter with a signet ring, the only jewel left him by his father, and on which were engraved three storks on a field azure. Then he addressed it, and put it into his pocket-book until such time as a courier should be leaving for Gascony. From the castle of Sigognac, to which his thoughts of Peter had transported him, he returned to Paris and the existing condition of matters. Although it was now late, he could hear all around him the low rumour of the great city, which, no more than the sound of the ocean, is ever stilled. Now it was a horse's steps, now the rumbling of carriage-wheels dying out in the distance, a song trolled by a belated reveller, the crash of sword-blades, the cry of a pedestrian assaulted by cut-purses on the bridge, the howl of a dog, or other similar indistinct sounds.

Sigognac fancied, however, that among these noises he could make out in the passage the step of a booted man, walking gently, as if anxious not to be heard. He blew out his candle, so that the light should not betray him, and softly opening his door, he caught sight, in the dark corridor, of a man carefully wrapped up in a dark-coloured cloak, who was going towards the room of that other traveller whose appearance had

struck him as suspicious. Presently another fellow, whose boots creaked in spite of his attempts to walk lightly, proceeded in the same direction. Half an hour had scarcely passed when a third rascal of most unprepossessing mien, showed up in the faint light of the lantern, just about going out, and walked down the passage. Like the others, he was armed, and his cape was cocked up behind by a long thrusting sword. The shadow cast over his face by the brim of a beaver with black plumes prevented his features from being made out.

This procession of scoundrels struck Sigognac as altogether ill-timed and peculiar, while the fact that the men were four in number reminded him of the ambush to which he had nearly fallen a victim in the lane at Poictiers, when leaving the theatre after his quarrel with the Duke de Vallombreuse. This recollection was like a flash of light, and he immediately recognised the fellow whose face had so bothered him in the kitchen as being the rascal whose attack upon him might have proved successful had he not been on his guard. He was the very one whom he had tumbled over, heels over head, his hat driven down to his eyes, with the stroke of his swashbuckler sword. The

others were no doubt his companions, who had been so valiantly routed by Herod and Scappino. By what chance, or rather, in the execution of what plot did they happen to turn up all together in the inn on the very night the company of players had taken up its quarters there? It was plain they must have followed the chariot stage by stage. Yet Sigognac had kept a bright look-out upon the road, though of course it is difficult to ascertain that a horseman is a foe, when he rides by with an indifferent air, and does not stop, scarcely casting the merest inattentive look upon you, a look called out by any incident of travel. What was quite certain was that neither the love nor the hate of the young Duke was lulled to sleep, and that he was endeavouring to satisfy the one and the other. He meant his vengeance to get the better both of Isabella and of Sigognac.

Personally very brave, the Baron did not fear, so far as he himself was concerned, the attacks the quartet of hired cut-throats might make upon him, knowing well that the mere flash of his good sword would put them to flight; for they would assuredly not prove braver armed with rapiers than with sticks. But he did dread some cowardly and subtile attempt against the

young actress. He therefore took his precautions, and resolved not to go to bed. Lighting every candle in his room, he threw his door wide-open, so that a blaze of light fell upon the opposite wall, right against Isabella's door. Then he seated himself quietly, after having placed his drawn sword and dagger ready to his hand in case of need. For a long time his watch was unrewarded. The chimes of the Samaritaine and the bells of the nearer Augustinian convent had struck two, when a soft rustling was heard, and soon in the bright square of light cast upon the wall appeared, looking very undecided, sheepish, and much put out, the first rascal, who was none else than Mérindol, one of the Duke de Vallombreuse's ruffians. Sigognac was standing at his own door, sword in hand, equally ready to defend himself or to attack, and with so bold, fierce, and defiant an air that Mérindol sneaked by head down and mute. The other three, who were following in Indian file, startled by the glare of light in the centre of which blazed the formidable nobleman, slid away as quickly as they could, the last of them, indeed, dropping a crowbar with which he had no doubt intended to pry open Captain Fracasse's door while the latter was sound asleep. The Baron mocked them with a

derisive gesture, and presently the sound of horses being brought out of the stables, was heard in the yard. The four scoundrels, having failed to bring off their attempt, were cutting away as fast as they could.

At breakfast, Herod said to Sigognac: —

"Captain, are you not curious to see something of the city, one of the largest in the world, and of which so many tales are told? If it is agreeable to you, I shall be glad to act as your guide and pilot, for I am thoroughly acquainted with every reef, rock, shoal, Euripes, Charybdis, and Scylla of this ocean, so dangerous to strangers and country people, having sailed among them in my youth. I shall be your Palinurus, and you may rely on my not tumbling into the sea, like the one spoken of by Vergilius Maro. We are in the best possible place to watch the show, the Pont-Neuf being to Paris what the Via Sacra was to Rome, that is, the parade ground, meeting-place and peripatetic gallery of newsmongers, simpletons, poets, swindlers, cut-purses, acrobats, courtesans, gentlemen, townsmen, soldiers, and people of all sorts and conditions."

"I much like your proposal, my dear Herod, but pray ask Scappino to remain and to keep his eye upon any people coming and going whose ways are in the

least suspicious. Let him not leave Isabella; Vallombreuse is determined to be avenged, and his tools are all around us. Last night I came again upon the four scoundrels we laid out in such right good fashion in the lane at Poictiers. As I was sitting up, fearing that some attempt might be made against our young friend, they failed to carry out their purpose, and on finding they were discovered, made off on their horses that were standing in the stables, ready saddled, on the pretext that they had to make an early start."

"I do not believe," replied the Tyrant, "that they would venture to make any attempt by day, for help would come at the least outcry, and besides, they must still feel pretty sore at having failed. So Scappino, Blazius, and Leander will form a guard sufficient for Isabella until we return. But in case of any quarrel or similar trouble befalling us while we are out, I shall buckle on my sword so as to back you up in case of need."

Whereupon the Tyrant girded round his majestic paunch a broad belt from which depended a long and strong rapier. Over one shoulder he threw a short cloak that could not possibly hamper his freedom of motion, and pulled down over his eyes his beaver with

the red feather, for a man has to beware, when crossing bridges, of the puffs of wind that blow a hat into the stream uncommonly quickly, to the intense joy of pages, lackeys, and street-boys. That was the reason that led Herod to pull his hat well down, but it had also occurred to him that it might afterwards injure Sigognac if he were seen walking in public with a strolling player. He therefore concealed, as carefully as he could, his face so well-known to the crowd.

At the corner of the Rue Dauphine, Herod pointed out to Sigognac, under the porch of the Augustinian monastery, people who were buying meat seized on the butcher's stalls on forbidden days, and who were fighting to get a piece at a low price. He also showed him the newsmongers, busy discussing the fate of kingdoms, changing the frontiers of countries as they pleased, dividing up empires, and reporting word for word everything ministers alone in their own rooms had said. This was the place where were sold gazettes, pamphlets, satirical productions, and other small printed papers smuggled quietly around. All these curious people were pale, crazy-looking, and very badly dressed.

"We shall not waste time listening to the trash

they talk," said Herod, "or we shall never get along. Unless, of course, you would care to learn the contents of the Sophi of Persia's latest edict, or to make yourself acquainted with the ceremonial in force at the court of Prester John. Let us go on a little farther, and we shall see one of the finest sights in the world, such as even the theatres do not present in their elaborately mounted and set plays."

And indeed, the prospect that opened out before Sigognac and his friend, once they had traversed the arches built over the branch of the stream, was then and is now unparalleled in the world. The foreground was formed by the bridge itself, with graceful semicircular recesses above each pier. The Pont-Neuf was not lumbered up, like the Pont au Change and the Pont Saint-Michel, with two rows of lofty houses. The great King who had ordered its erection did not wish that mean and ugly buildings should obstruct the view of the sumptuous palace, the home of our kings, the whole length of which can be seen from this point.

On the piece of ground which forms the point of the island, the good King, calm as Marcus Aurelius, bestrode his bronze steed at the top of a pedestal, against the four corners of which leaned four prisoners,

also in metal, writhing in their bonds. It was enclosed by a railing in hammered iron-work, with rich volutes, by way of protecting the base against the irreverent familiarities of the populace, for at times, making their way over the railing, street-boys were wicked enough to climb up behind the debonair monarch, and this more particularly on the occasion of a royal entry or an interesting execution. The sombre tone of the bronze stood out strongly against the sky and the background of distant hills seen beyond the Pont Rouge.

On the left bank, the spire of the old Romanesque church of Saint-Germain des Prés, and the tall roofs of the Hôtel de Nevers, a great palace that was never finished, shot up above the houses. A little farther, a tower, the one remaining relic of the Hôtel de Nesle, bathed its base in the stream, amid a mass of débris, and though long since fallen into ruin, yet figured proudly on the horizon. Beyond it, again, stretched the Grenouillière, and through the dim azure haze could be seen against the sky-line the three crosses planted on top of Calvary, otherwise Mount Valérien.

The Louvre splendidly filled up the right bank, brilliantly gilded by the bright sunbeams, luminous rather than warm, as is the case with winter sunshine,

but which brought out in remarkable relief the details of an architecture at once rich and noble. The long gallery that connects the Tuileries and the Louvre, a marvellous architectural arrangement that enables the King to be alternately, as he pleases, in his good city or in the country, displayed its unparalleled beauties, its delicate carvings, its ornamented cornices, its vermiculated boss-work, its columns and pilasters that equalled the work of the cleverest of Greek and Roman architects.

From the corner of Charles IX's balcony, the building was set back, allowing space for gardens and for parasitical erections, mushrooms growing at the foot of the ancient edifice. Along the quay swelled the arches of culverts, and somewhat farther down stream than the Tower de Nesle rose another tower, a relic of the old Louvre of Charles V, which flanked the gate built between the palace and the river. These two old towers, paired after the Gothic fashion, faced each other diagonally, and greatly contributed to the charm of the prospect. They recalled feudal times, and among the recent architecture, in such good taste, stood out as among modern furniture, covered with silver and gilding, stands out an old chair or an old oaken

dresser, curiously wrought. These relics of bygone ages impart to a city an appearance of respectability, and they should on no consideration be destroyed.

At the end of the Tuileries garden, where the city ended, was to be seen the Conference gate, and along the river, beyond the garden, the Cours-la-Reine with its trees, the favourite driving-ground of courtiers and people of rank who repaired thither to show off their equipages.

The two banks which I have rapidly sketched, framed in the animated scene on the river, which was traversed by boats passing from one side to the other, and obstructed by barges moored and drawn up near the banks, some laden with hay, others with wood, others again with diverse cargoes. Near the quay, at the foot of the Louvre, the royal galleys attracted the eyes by their carved and gilded ornaments and their colours bearing the arms of France.

Returning towards the bridge, the finials of Saint-Germain l'Auxerrois were seen projecting above the sharp gables of the houses, that looked like cards propped up against each other. Having gazed sufficiently long upon this prospect, Herod led Sigognac opposite the façade of the Samaritaine.

THE PONT-NEUF

"Although this is the rallying-point of simpletons, who spend a long time here waiting to see the metal bell-ringer strike the hour upon the gong of the clock, we must even come and do likewise. A little gaping round does not ill beseem a newly arrived traveller. It would be more affected than sensible to frown upon what delights the masses."

Thus did the Tyrant apologise to his friend for keeping him standing now on one foot, now on the other, in front of the little pumping station, waiting until, the hands having reached the hour, the joyous chimes should break out, and start the figure of Jesus, in gilt lead, speaking to the Samaritan woman leaning on the edge of the well, the astronomical dial with the zodiac and the ebony ball indicating the courses of the sun and the moon, the face from which poured out water drawn from the river, the Hercules, ending in a stone casing, and supporting the whole of this decoration, and the hollow statue serving for a vane, like the statue of Fortune on the Dogana at Venice, and the Giralda at Seville.

At last the hand reached the figure X; the chimes rang out most delightfully in thin silvery or bronze tones, performing a saraband air; the bell-striker raised

his brazen arm, and the hammer fell upon the gong as many times as there were strokes to strike. This mechanism, due to the ingenuity of the Fleming Lintlaer, greatly tickled Sigognac, who, although naturally very clever, was also very green in many respects, having never before travelled out of his little castle on the moors.

"Now," said Herod, "let us turn the other way. The view is not so fine in that direction, for it is bounded too closely by the houses on the Pont au Change. The buildings on the Mégisserie quay are not worth looking at, but, on the other hand, the tower of Saint-Jacques, the steeple of Saint-Méderic and those distant spires are characteristic of a great city. Then, on the Palace Island, on the quay bordering the main stream, the houses of red brick and courses of white stone and of uniform design have quite a monumental look, which is carried out by the old Clock Tower, with its pepper-pot roof, that often shows up very seasonably through the lower stratum of mist. The Place Dauphine itself, triangular in form and opening out opposite the King's statue, while it allows a view of the gate of the palace of Justice, may well be reckoned one of the finest and best designed known.

THE PONT-NEUF

The spire of the Sainte-Chapelle, the two-storied church, so famous for its treasury and its relics, tops gracefully the slate roofs of the houses of the square. You note that these roofs are high, slated, and pierced with ornamented dormer windows, that have a very new look, and no wonder, since the Place has but recently been finished. Indeed, in my childhood I played at hop-scotch on the very ground on which these houses now stand. Thanks to the liberality of our kings, Paris is being more and more embellished, to the great admiration of strangers and foreigners who, on their return home, bring wonderful accounts of the city, which they find improved, enlarged, and almost renovated at each successive visit."

"What amazes me even more than the size, richness, and splendour of the buildings, both private and public," answered Sigognac, "is the infinite number of people who swarm and crowd in the streets, on the squares, and on the bridges, just like ants whose nest has been turned up, and who hasten thither and hither with apparently aimless gestures. It is strange to reflect that every one of the individuals who compose this countless multitude has a room, a bed, good or bad, and food almost every day, else he would starve

to death. What a prodigious quantity of victuals, what numberless herds of oxen, how many barrels of flour and puncheons of wine it must take to feed all the people collected here, while on our moors you may go miles without seeing a single human creature."

And truly the crowd moving along the Pont-Neuf was well calculated to astonish a stranger. The centre of the highway was filled with coaches, following or meeting one another, some drawn by two, some by four horses; some newly painted and gilded, lined with velvet, with glass windows and easy springs, a troop of lackeys hanging on behind, and driven by coachmen with rubicund faces, who found it difficult to restrain their spirited horses in the crowd; others less fine, with tarnished paint, leather curtains, poor springs, and drawn by much quieter steeds which had to be touched up with the lash every now and then, the whole turn-out betokening a less wealthy owner. In the former, one could see through the windows richly attired courtiers and ladies coquettishly dressed; in the latter, magistrates or lawyers, physicians or other serious-minded people. Mixed up with these carriages were carts laden with stone, wood, or barrels, and driven by rough carters, who at every block took God's name very

much in vain. Through this maze of vehicles, horsemen strove to make their way, and did not always succeed in avoiding being scraped and mud-bespattered by the wheels. The sedan chairs, both public and private, endeavoured to keep on the edges of the current in order not to be swept away into it, and hugged the parapet of the bridge as closely as they could. A herd of oxen happened to come along, and the confusion at once became indescribable; the horned cattle, bewildered, chased by dogs, beaten by the drivers, bolted in every direction with heads down. The horses, frightened by them, plunged and reared; the pedestrians took to their heels lest they should be gored, and the dogs, slipping between the legs of the less agile, tumbled them over in the mud. One lady, even, powdered and patched, gorgeously attired in flame-coloured ribbons and jet embroideries, who looked like a priestess of Venus seeking whom she might devour, stumbled on her tall pattens and fell flat on her back, — without hurting herself, however. Then again a company of troops would come along, on its way to some post, drums beating and flags flying, and the crowd had perforce to make way for the sons of Mars, who are not accustomed to brook any resistance.

"There is nothing out of the way in all this," said Herod to Sigognac. "Let us push through the press, if we can, and get to the place where the real curiosities of the Pont-Neuf do congregate; there are among them some most quaint and extraordinary characters, whom it will be interesting to observe closer. Nowhere else will you find such a nondescript lot; they seem to spring up out of the Paris pavements like flowers, or rather like misshapen, abnormal mushrooms that flourish nowhere save in the black mud of this city. We are in luck! Here is Périgourdin du Maillet, called the gutter poet, who pays his court to the bronze king. Some maintain that he is a monkey that has escaped from a menagerie; others, that he is one of the camels the Duke de Nevers brought home. The question has never yet been settled; for my own part, I take him to be a man, because of his craziness, his arrogance, and his dirty habits. Monkeys hunt out the vermin that afflicts them and destroy it in a spirit of vengeance and by way of reprisals, but he takes no such pains. Camels smooth their coats and dust themselves all over with the sand as with powdered iris-root; besides they have a number of stomachs, and digest their food, a thing this fellow could not do, for he is

always as empty-stomached as empty-headed. Throw him an alms; he will take it with a curse and a grumble. That shows conclusively that he is a man, for he is at once crazy, dirty, and ungrateful."

Sigognac drew a piece of silver from his purse and held it out to the poet, who, being sunk in a deep reverie after the manner of his crack-brained and uncertain-tempered tribe, did not at first perceive the Baron standing before him. When he at last emerged from his empty meditation and caught sight of Sigognac, he clutched at the coin with the quick gesture of a madman, and stowed it away in his pocket, grumbling out some bad language. Then, the demon of riming seizing upon him once more, he began to mumble, to roll his eyes, to make grimaces fully as queer as the faces on the heads carved by Germain Pilon under the cornice of the Pont-Neuf, and to beat time with his feet to the lines he muttered between his teeth, so that he looked like a morra player and furnished no end of entertainment to the small boys collected in a ring around him.

The man was dressed in a fashion more outlandish even than the figure of Shrove Tuesday, when it is borne along to the burning on Ash Wednesday, or

than the scarecrows set up in vineyards and orchards to drive away birds. One could have sworn, on seeing him, that he was the bell-striker on the Samaritaine, the Moorish dwarf of the New Market, or the man in armour of Saint Paul's that had rigged itself out in a second-hand-clothes shop. He wore an old rusty beaver, faded by the sunshine and washed out by the rain, bound round with a greasy cord, and adorned, by way of a plume, with a moth-eaten cock's-feather. This hat, which resembled an apothecary's filter more than a human head-dress, came down over his eyebrows, compelling him to throw his head back in order to see, the eyes being practically hidden by the limp and filthy brim. His doublet, of absolutely indescribable stuff and shade, seemed to be better tempered than its wearer, for it grinned at every seam. This comical vestment was bursting with jollity, and with old age also, seeing that it had lived through more years than Methuselah himself. For belt and baldric he had a strip of frieze selvage, from which, instead of a sword, hung a foil, with the button broken off, which scored the ground behind him like a ploughshare. Yellow satin breeches, once worn by some masquerader in a ballet were tucked into a pair of odd boots, one of

which was an oyster fisherman's, of black leather, and the other a white Russia-leather jack-boot; the one flat footed, the other crooked and armed with a spur. The sole of this particular one would long since have parted company with the upper, had it not been fastened with many turns of a piece of string like the fastenings of a cothurn of antiquity. A cloak of coarse red camlet, worn indifferently at all seasons of the year, completed a costume which would have made a Perche apple-gatherer blush with shame, but of which the poet appeared to be proud exceedingly. From under the folds of the cloak, by the pommel of the foil, on which he apparently relied as a defensive weapon, showed a crust of bread.

Farther along, in one of the semicircular recesses on the piers, a blind man, accompanied by a fat woman who served him as guide, was yowling disreputable songs or wailing in a comically lugubrious tone, a ballad reciting the life, crimes, and death of a famous criminal. In another place, a charlatan, dressed in red serge, and a pair of forceps in his hand, was prancing around upon a platform ornamented with rows of teeth, canines, incisors, molars, strung on brass wire. He was engaged in haranguing the crowd, declaring

that he could extract without pain (so far as he himself was concerned) the most stubborn and deep-rooted snags with a pistol shot or a twist of his sword point, unless his clients preferred to be operated on in the ordinary way.

"I do not extract teeth," he shouted in a shrill voice, "I pluck them. Come! Let any one among you who has the toothache step right up; I shall cure him in a twinkling!"

A boor, whose swollen cheek showed he was suffering from an ulcerated tooth, marched up and took his seat on the chair, and the charlatan plunged into his mouth his formidable polished steel forceps. The poor devil, instead of clutching the arms of the chair, followed his tooth, which did not want to leave him, and rose a couple of feet in the air, to the intense delight of the crowd. A sharp wrench put an end to his torture, and the quack brandished on high his bloody trophy.

While this grotesque scene was going on, a monkey, tied to the platform by a chain fastened to the leather belt round its waist, mimicked in the most amusing manner the howls, gestures, and contortions of the patient.

This absurd spectacle did not long hold the attention of Herod and Sigognac, who preferred to stop in front of the stalls, set up on the parapet, where gazettes and old books were sold. The Tyrant pointed out to his companion a ragged rascal who had taken up his post on the projecting cornice on the outside of the bridge, with his crutch and his cup beside him, and who from that coin of vantage shoved his dirty hat under the noses of the people who stopped to glance through a book or to watch the flowing river; thus giving them an opportunity of dropping into it a doubloon or a tester, or more if they pleased, for no coin came amiss to him, not even counterfeit, which he managed to pass.

"In my part of the world," said Sigognac, "it is the swallows only that perch on cornices, but here, I see, it is men."

"You do not call that rascal a man, do you?" returned Herod. "It is mighty civil of you, but it is true that a Christian should despise no one. For the matter of that, there are all sorts of people on this bridge, even honest men, since we are here ourselves. And as the proverb says, you cannot pass along it without meeting a monk, a white horse, and a strumpet.

Here you are! Do you see that monk clattering along in a hurry? Depend upon it the white horse is not far off. Surely! there is one. Look! straight in front of you; that nag curveting over there. The woman alone is lacking, and I dare swear we shall not have to look for her long. And I am right, for instead of one courtesan, here come three of the breed, with bare bosoms and rouged up to the eyes, laughing affectedly to show their teeth. The proverb spoke the truth."

Suddenly a row broke out at the other end of the bridge, and the crowd ran in the direction of the noise. It was a number of swashbucklers who had got into a fight on the open space by the statue, where they had more elbow room. They were shouting, "Kill him! kill him!" and pretended to lay on furiously, but their thrusts were all make-believe, their lunges were careful and simulated, like those of combatants on the stage, where, no matter how many are killed or wounded, there is never any one left dead. There were two couples of them fighting, and they appeared to be animated with the liveliest courage, for they brushed aside the swords of their companions who were endeavouring to part them. The feigned quarrel had

been started for the purpose of collecting a crowd, in which the pickpockets and cut-purses might ply their trade undisturbed. So more than one curious individual, who had made his way in with a handsome plush-lined cloak on his back and well-filled pockets, emerged minus the former, and with his money gone without his knowing it. Whereupon the duellists, who had never really quarrelled, being hand in glove with each other, made up and shook hands with a great show of loyalty, declaring that honour was satisfied, no difficult matter in their case, seeing that the honour of such gallows-birds could not have been much damaged.

Sigognac, by Herod's advice, had refrained from approaching too close to the men, so that he could not see them very plainly through the gaps between the heads and shoulders of the spectators. Nevertheless he fancied he recognised the four villains as being the men whose suspicious actions he had watched the night before in the inn on the Place Dauphine, and he imparted his suspicions to Herod. The fellows, however, had already cleared out, and in that crowd it would have been as difficult to find them as a needle in a haystack.

"It is not unlikely," said Herod, "that the row was

got up on purpose to draw you into it, for we are surely being followed up by the Duke de Vallombreuse's emissaries. One of the combatants would certainly have pretended that you were in his way, and before you could have drawn would have pinked you, apparently by accident, with a murderous thrust, and, at need, his fellows would have finished you. The whole business would have been explained away as the result of an unexpected row, for it is impossible to prove premeditation and ambushing in such cases."

"I hate to think that a man of rank can resort to such despicable measures as having his rival put out of the way by ruffians," said Sigognac. "If the Duke is not satisfied with the result of our first meeting, I am ready to cross swords with him again, until the one or the other of us is killed. That is the way such matters are managed between men of honour."

"No doubt," replied Herod. "But the Duke is well aware, mad with pride though he be, that the issue of such a combat would be death to him. He has tried your blade and has felt your point. Believe me, he bears you a devilish grudge in consequence of his defeat, and he will not be particular as to the means he makes use of to get rid of you."

"If he objects to the sword," said Sigognac, "I will fight him on horseback, with pistols; then he will have no reason to shelter himself behind my skill with the sword."

Talking thus, the pair reached the Quai de l'École, where Sigognac was nearly run over by a coach, in spite of his springing quickly aside. Thanks to his being thin, he escaped being crushed against the wall, so closely did the coach bear down upon him, although there was plenty of room on the other side, and the coachman, by pulling his horses a little to one side, could have avoided the pedestrian whom he seemed bent on running down. The windows of the carriage were closed, and the blinds drawn down; had the latter been drawn aside, there would have been seen a splendidly dressed nobleman with his arm in a black taffeta sling. Even the red reflection of the blinds did not conceal his pallor, and his thin black eyebrows contrasted with his white face. His teeth, brighter than pearls, were biting deep into his bleeding lower lip, and his small mustache, pointed with cosmetics, bristled like the whiskers of a tiger scenting its prey. He was unquestionably handsome, but the expression of his features was so cruel that he would have inspired

horror rather than love; just then, at least, when his face was strangely altered by wicked and hateful passions. This sketch, obtained by drawing aside the blind in a carriage driven at top speed, has no doubt enabled my reader to recognise the young Duke de Vallombreuse.

"Another failure," said he to himself, as the horses took him along by the Tuileries to the Conference gate. "Yet I had promised twenty-five louis to that man of mine if he managed to run foul of that damned Sigognac and to crush him against a post as if by accident. My star is paling, and no mistake. That country bumpkin gets the better of me every time: Isabella adores him and detests me; he has thrashed my ruffians and wounded me. But whether he be invulnerable and protected by an amulet or not, die he must and shall, even if it costs me my name and my ducal rank!"

"Huh!" said Herod, breathing hard, "the horses in that coach seem to be like those of Diomedes, which charged men, tore them to pieces and fed on their flesh. I trust you are not wounded? That scoundrelly coachman saw you quite plainly, and I would wager the heaviest receipts we have ever made that he

was trying to run you over, and that for some mysterious reason or vengeance he drove his horses deliberately upon you. I am sure he did. Did you happen to notice if there was a coat of arms upon the door? Being a nobleman, you are versed in the science of heraldry, and familiar with the arms of the principal families."

"I am sure I do not know," replied Sigognac. "I fancy that even a herald at arms would not have observed the metals and colours of a coat of arms just then, let alone its divisions, charges, and augmentations of honour. I was too busy trying to get out of the way of the vehicle to notice whether it bore lions passant, guardant, or issuant, alerions or martlets, besants or torteaux, crosses urdées or dancettées, or other emblems."

"That is a pity," returned Herod, "for if you had it would have given us a clue and perhaps enabled us to get at the bottom of this dark intrigue, for it is plain that some one is trying to get rid of you by hook or by crook; *quibuscumque viis*, as our friend Blazius the Pedant would not fail to remark in that Latin of his. Now, although we have no proof of the fact, I should not feel in the least surprised to learn that the coach is

owned by the Duke de Vallombreuse, who proposed to give himself the pleasure of driving over his adversary's body."

"You ought to be ashamed to think such a thing, Herod," said Sigognac. "That would be a deed most foul, infamous, and abominable, and wholly unworthy of one belonging to a great house, as is the case, after all, with Vallombreuse. Besides, remember that we left him badly wounded in his residence at Poictiers. How, then, could he be now in Paris, which we entered but yesterday?"

"Did we not stay long enough in Tours and Orleans, where we gave several performances, to enable him, with the means at his command, to follow us up and even to outstrip us? As for his wound, considering he was attended by the very first physicians, it must long since have closed up and healed, especially as it was not severe enough to prevent a young and vigorous fellow from travelling comfortably in a coach or a litter. You had best, therefore, Captain, keep a bright look-out, for there is no doubt that some deadly trick is to be played upon you or that you are to be drawn into an ambush under the guise of an accident. Your death would leave Isabella defenceless in

the hands of the Duke, for what could we poor strollers do against so powerful a nobleman? It is possible that Vallombreuse is not himself in Paris, but it is certain that his tools are, since you yourself, had you not, urged by well-founded suspicions, watched last night sword in hand, would have been neatly despatched in your own room."

Herod's arguments were too plausible to be easily refuted; the Baron merely nodded in assent, and put his hand to his sword, which he half drew from the scabbard, to make sure it worked easily and ran no risk of sticking fast in its sheath.

During this conversation the two men had proceeded along the Louvre and the Tuileries as far as the Conference gate, which led to the Cours-la-Reine. There they saw coming in their direction a great cloud of dust, through which flashed the gleam of swords and breastplates. They drew aside to allow the cavalry to pass by; it was escorting the King's coach, His Majesty being on his way back from Saint Germain to the Louvre. The windows of the carriage being open and the blinds drawn up, in order, no doubt, that the people might gaze their fill upon the monarch who was the arbiter of their destinies, they were able to see a pale phantom,

dressed in black, with the blue ribbon on his breast, motionless as if made of wax. Long brown hair framed in a face devoid of any expression save that of intense weariness, a Spanish weariness, a weariness like that of Philip II, and such as the Escorial alone, with its silence and solitude, can produce. The eyes did not seem to reflect what they gazed upon; there was no glow of desire, thought, or will in them. Deep distaste of life had caused the lower lip to relax, and it hung morosely in sullen fashion. The thin white hands rested on the knees like those of Egyptian idols; yet there was an air of regal majesty about that gloomy figure which personified France, and in whose veins ran thicker and duller the generous blood of Henry IV.

The coach went by like a flash, followed by a troop of cavalry forming the remainder of the escort. The sight made Sigognac thoughtful. In his simplicity, he had imagined the King to be a sort of supernatural being, powerful and radiant in a blaze of gold and gems, proud, splendid, of triumphant mien, handsomer, taller, stronger than all other men; and now he had seen a sad, poor, weary, suffering figure, almost mean, in a dress as sombre as a mourning habit, apparently

unconscious of the outer world and plunged in a gloomy reverie.

"Can it be," said he to himself, "that that was the King? — the man who stands for so many millions of men; who is at the top of the pyramid; towards whom so many hands are outstretched in supplication from below; who makes the cannons belch forth death or be mute as he wills; who raises men up or strikes them down; who deals out punishment and recompense; who can pardon even when the law has ordered death, and with a single word can change the course of a life? Were his glance to fall upon me, I should be rich instead of penniless, powerful instead of helpless; I should become a new man, to whom all should bow and whom all would court. The ruinous towers of Sigognac would rise restored prouder than ever, and new domains would be added to my narrow patrimony. I should be the lord of vale and hill! But what probability is there that he will ever notice me in the human swarm that stirs around his feet and that he does not even glance at? And even if he did note me, what can there be between him and me?"

These reflections, and many others which it would take too long to relate, filled Sigognac's mind as he

walked in silence by the companion's side. Herod respected his preoccupation, and amused himself watching the coming and going of the carriages. Then he drew the Baron's attention to the fact that it was close on the hour of noon, and time to turn the needle of the compass towards the pole star of soup, seeing there is one thing only which is worse than a dinner that has grown cold, and that is a warmed-up meal.

Sigognac yielded to this unanswerable reason, and they retraced their steps to the inn. Nothing worthy of note had happened during their absence; a couple of hours, merely, had gone by. Isabella, quietly seated at table in front of a plate of soup, received her friend with her usual sweet smile and held out her fair hand to him. The players asked him chaffing or eager questions about his excursion through the streets, inquiring whether he still owned a cloak, a pocket handkerchief, and a purse, which Sigognac laughingly answered in the affirmative. The bright chatter soon made him forget his sombre preoccupation, and he ended by asking himself if he were not the dupe of his hypochondriacal imagination that insisted on seeing an ambush in everything that happened to him.

He was right, all the same, in his suspicions, for his

enemies, in spite of the failure of their previous attempts, had not given up their evil purpose. Mérindol, whom the Duke threatened to send back to the galleys whence he had taken him, if he did not make away with Sigognac, had made up his mind to call in the aid of a bravo friend of his, who stuck at nothing, however great the risk, so long as he was well paid. Mérindol felt himself unable, single-handed, to get the better of the Baron, especially as the latter now knew him and, being on his guard, was more difficult to get at.

He therefore started off in search of the ruffian, who dwelt on the Place du Marché-Neuf, near the Petit-Pont, — a quarter inhabited chiefly by bravoes, pick-pockets, cut-purses and other evil livers of the same sort.

Among the high, grimy houses, that leaned against each other like drunkards afraid of tumbling down, there was one dirtier, more ruinous, and more leprous even than its neighbours, the windows of which, overflowing with loathsome rags, resembled ripped up corpses from which the entrails were flowing. Mérindol entered a dark passage that led into this cavern, but soon the daylight failed him and, feeling with his hands the walls that were slimy and sticky as if slugs

had crawled over them, groped for and found in the obscurity the rope that served for a balustrade, and which might have been taken from a gibbet and greased with human fat, so slippery was it. He pulled himself up as well as he could by this sort of Jacob's-ladder, stumbling over the humps and callosities formed by the filth that had accumulated on the steps layer by layer since the days when Paris was still Lutetia.

As he ascended, however, the darkness became less intense. A wan, dim light filtered through the openings intended to admit light to the stairs, and which looked out into a yard as black and deep as the mouth of a mine. At last he reached the topmost story, half suffocated by the mephitic vapours that rose from the leads. Two or three doors opened upon the landing, the dirty plastered ceiling of which was ornamented with obscene arabesques, curled lines, and words fouler than any in Rabelais, done with the smoke of candles, fit frescoes for such a den.

One of the doors stood ajar; Mérindol kicked it open, objecting to touching it with his hand, and entered without further ceremony into the room that was the Louvre of Jacquemin Lampourde, bravo.

Acrid smoke made his throat and eyes smart so

badly that it was quite two minutes ere he could speak, coughing the while like a cat that has swallowed the feathers of the bird it is busy devouring. The smoke, profiting by the fact that the door stood open, spread out upon the landing-place, and the mist of it in the room becoming less thick, the visitor was able to make out the looks of the interior.

The den deserves to be described in detail, for it is not likely that my worthy readers have ever penetrated into such a place, and they cannot have the least idea of its utter shabbiness.

The furniture was mainly composed of the four walls, upon which the rainwater, leaking through the roof, had drawn virgin islands and streams not to be met with upon any geographical map. On the places that were within reach of the hand, the successive tenants of the hovel had amused themselves cutting in with their knives their incongruous, queer, or hideous names, urged thereto by the desire which impels even the most obscure to leave behind them some trace of their passage upon earth. These names were often accompanied by that of some woman, a street Iris, and surmounted by a heart pierced with an arrow that looked like a fish-bone.

Some of the more artistic tenants had attempted, by means of a coal taken from the fire, to draw some grotesque sketch, a face with a pipe or a criminal jigging about at the end of a rope, with his tongue stuck out.

On the shelf of the mantelpiece, under which smoked and sizzled branches from a stolen faggot, there was a medley of odds and ends, covered with dust: a bottle with a candle stuck in the neck of it; the candle itself half burned down, and the tallow run down in great masses upon the glass, an appropriate torch for a prodigal and drunkard; a backgammon dice-box; three loaded dice; Robert de Bernière's "Hours" for the use of lansquenet players; a bundle of old pipes; a stone tobacco jar; a sock containing a toothless comb; a dark lantern, the lens of which looked like the eye of a night-bird; bunches of keys, no doubt false, for there was not in the room a single piece of furniture that locked; a pair of curling-irons for the mustaches; a broken bit of mirror, the silvering of which was scratched as if the devil had sharpened his claws upon it, and in which but one eye at a time could be seen and even then it would not have done for the eye to be like Juno's, whom Homer called "ox-

eyed" — and numberless other trifles which it is needless to describe.

Opposite the fireplace, on a portion of the wall less damp than the rest, and furthermore hung with a piece of green serge, blazed a trophy of swords most carefully kept polished, of proved temper, and bearing on their steel blades the trade-marks of the most famous Spanish and Italian sword-makers. There were two-edged swords, triangular blades, blades grooved down the length to allow the blood to run off, daggers with large shell-hilts, cutlasses, poniards, stilettoes, and other priceless weapons, the value of which contrasted strangely with the poverty of the place. There was not a spot of rust, not a speck of dust upon them, for they were the killer's tools, and in no princely arsenal could they have been more cared for, oftener rubbed with oil, polished with wool and preserved in their pristine excellence. They looked as if they had just come from the shop, for Lampourde, neglectful of everything else, took the greatest pride in keeping them furbished up. And when one reflected upon the nature of the man's trade, such scrupulous care struck one as horrible and the weapons themselves seemed to reflect blood from their shining blades.

Seats there were none, and every man was free to stand and grow up, unless he preferred, for the sake of saving the soles of his boots, to sit down upon an old basket with the bottom knocked out, a trunk, or the lute case that lay in a corner.

The table consisted of a shutter placed upon trestles, and also answered the purpose of a bed. After one of his carouses, the master of the place was wont to stretch out upon it, and pulling over himself the table-cloth, which was simply the lining of his cloak, the outer part of which he had sold in order to warm his stomach, he would turn over towards the wall, to avoid seeing the empty bottles, which constitute a most doleful spectacle for drunkards.

It was in that attitude that Mérindol discovered Jacquemin Lampourde, who was snoring fit to wake the dead, although every clock in the neighbourhood had struck the hour of four in the afternoon.

A huge venison pasty, the golden remains of which showed a tracery of pistachio, lay cut open on the floor, and more than half devoured, like a body torn by wolves in a wood. It was surrounded by a fabulous array of flagons the very soul of which had been drained, and that were now but mere figures of bot-

tles, empty vessels fit only to be made into broken glass.

A fellow, whom Mérindol had not at first noticed, was sound asleep under the table, still holding between his teeth the broken stem of a pipe, the bowl of which had rolled on the floor, filled with tobacco that the fellow had been too drunk to light.

"Hallo! Lampourde; wake up! You have slept long enough! And do not look at me with eyes as round as saucers; I am no commissary or sergeant of police come to fetch you to the Châtelet prison. There is important business on hand; try to collect your fuddled senses and to listen to me."

The individual thus summoned rose slowly and sleepily, sat up, stretched out his long arms that reached nearly to the walls on either side, opened a huge mouth filled with sharp fangs, and yawned mightily, like a weary lion, uttering at the same time a number of inarticulate guttural sounds.

Jacquemin Lampourde was no Adonis, although he claimed to be something of a lady-killer and boasted of conquests even among the highest in the land. His great height, of which he was very proud, his thin stork-like legs, his narrow shoulders, his bony chest,

reddened by drink, that showed through his half-opened shirt, his simian arms, so long that he could fasten his garters almost without bending, did not combine in a pleasant make-up, while as to his face, the chief feature in it was a monstrously big nose, which recalled that of Cyrano de Bergerac, the cause of so many duels. But Lampourde found consolation for the size of his proboscis in the popular saying, "A face is never spoiled by a big nose." His eyes, though still dulled by drink and sleep, had a steel-cold flash that spoke of courage and decision. Down his thin cheeks two or three perpendicular wrinkles, like sword-cuts, drew rigid furrows that were not precisely dimples. A very unkempt shock of black hair fuzzed around his face, which would have answered admirably for the carving on a fiddle-head, and yet nobody felt like making sport of him, so peculiarly alarming, sly, and fierce was his expression.

"The devil take the fool who breaks in on my enjoyment in this way, and comes floundering through my anacreontic dreams. There! I was happy, for the loveliest princess on earth was receiving me graciously, and you dispel my dream."

"A truce to your nonsense," said Mérindol impatiently. "Listen to me for two minutes."

"I never listen to anybody when I am drunk," majestically replied Lampourde, leaning on his elbow. "Besides, I am in funds; I have oceans of money. Last night we robbed an English nobleman who had his pockets full of pistoles, and I am hard at work eating and drinking up my share of them. There won't be many left after I have had a little game of lansquenet, however. So no business before night. Be at midnight on the platform on the Pont-Neuf, at the foot of the bronze horse. I shall be there, blooming, clear-headed, and alert, with every faculty in good shape. We can tune up then and agree on the amount to be paid; it will have to be pretty large, for you understand that you cannot call upon a gentleman of my kidney to undertake second-rate rascalities, insignificant robberies, or suchlike peccadilloes. I have got sick of stealing; I only do murder now; it is better form. A man then is a carnivorous animal, not a mere beast of prey. If it is a question of killing, I am your man; but only on condition that the fellow is to defend himself. A little opposition heartens a man up for his work."

"You need feel no anxiety on that score," answered Mérindol, with a nasty grin. "You will find your match."

"All the better," cried Lampourde. "It is ages since I have crossed swords with any one fit to face me. But enough for the present. Good-night to you, and let me sleep."

When Mérindol was gone Jacquemin Lampourde tried to fall asleep again, but in vain, for broken slumber cannot be mended. The bravo rose, roughly shook the fellow asleep under the table, and the pair trudged off to a low pot-house where lansquenet and bassett were played. The company consisted of troopers, swashbucklers, thieves, lackeys, clerks, and townsmen brought there by girls, poor pigeons destined to be plucked alive. The only sound heard was the rattling of dice in boxes and the shuffling of cards, for gamesters are a silent race, and it is only when they lose that they allow a few curses to escape them. After alternations of good and bad luck, a vacuum, abhorred alike by nature and by man, was made in Lampourde's pocket. He proposed to play on credit, but that sort of currency was not accepted in that place, where the gamblers on being paid were in the habit of biting the coins to test their genuineness, lest the louis should prove to be gilded lead and the testers to be made of tin. So out he had to go without a doit to his name, after

having made his entry into the place like a rich lord and rattling pistoles in his pockets.

"Ouf!" said he, when the cool night air struck him and steadied him. "Now am I cleaned out. Strange, money makes me drunk and stupid, and I see now why financiers are such fools. Being penniless, I am brilliant again; my brain fairly seethes with ideas. No longer Laridon, I am again Cæsar. Hallo! the bell-striker on the Samaritaine is hammering out midnight: Mérindol must be waiting for me in front of the bronze horse."

Whereupon he took his way to the Pont-Neuf.

Mérindol was at his post, watching his own shadow in the moonlight. The two bravoes, having first looked carefully around them to see if any one could hear them, whispered together for a long time. What they said to each other, I know not, but when Lampourde took leave of the Duke de Vallombreuse's agent, he was making gold chink in his pockets with an impudence that showed how dreaded he was on the Pont-Neuf.

XII

THE CROWN AND RADISH

JACQUEMIN LAMPOURDE was much exercised in his mind after leaving Mérindol, and on reaching the end of the Pont-Neuf, he stopped and remained for some time in great perplexity. Two opposing attractions tempted him sorely. On the one hand, the faint chink of gold sounding in his ear, lansquenet drew him with almost irresistible force. On the other, the clatter of glasses making itself heard, the wine-shop presented itself to him in no less seductive guise. An embarrassing dilemma with a vengeance! And although theologians declare free will to be man's noblest prerogative, the fact remains that Lampourde, a prey to two conflicting and equal attractions, — for he was as fierce a gamester as he was a steadfast toper, — did not know which way to turn. He started for the gambling-house, but forthwith the pot-bellied wine bottles, covered with dust and cobwebs, and topped with their capsules of sealing-wax, struck his imagina-

tion so dazzlingly that he started back for the wine-house. Then gambling shook at his ear a box filled with loaded dice, and evoked before him a semicircle of marked cards, diapered like a peacock's tail; and that enchanting vision nailed him to the spot.

"Come!" said the swashbuckler to himself, annoyed at his own indecision, "am I going to stay here stuck like an idol? I must look like a perfect ninny gaping at nothing, with that stupid and undecided face of mine. Happy thought! Suppose I were to cut both the card-table and the bottle, and go pay a visit to my goddess, my Iris, the incomparable beauty who holds my heart in thrall? But then she may be at some ball or nocturnal entertainment, at this hour, and not at home. Besides, voluptuousness is destructive of courage, and the greatest captains have had cause to regret being too fond of the ladies. There was Hercules and his Dejanira, for instance, Samson with his Delilah, and Mark Antony with his Cleopatra, and many more whose names I cannot remember, for it is many a long day since I was at school. Well, then, I give up the lascivious and objectionable fancy that occurred to me. But what am I to do about these

two charmers? If I choose the one I run the risk of regretting the other."

While evolving this monologue, Jacquemin Lampourde, his hands shoved well down into his pockets, his chin pressed down upon his ruff in such a way that it made his chin tuft curl up, seemed to be taking root in the pavement and turning into a statue, as happened to more than one individual told of in Ovid's "Metamorphoses." Suddenly he gave such a start that a belated townsman, who happened to be passing by, took fright and quickened his steps, believing the man was going to assault him or, at the very least, steal his cloak from him. But Lampourde had no idea of robbing the fool, of whose presence he was not even aware, so deep was his abstraction. A brilliant thought had just occurred to him and had put an end to all his uncertainty.

He quickly drew a doubloon from his pocket, spun it in the air, after having said, "Tails, wine-shop; heads, gambling hell."

The coin spun well, and then, brought back to earth by its weight, fell upon a paving-stone, glittering golden, as it did so, in the silver rays of the moon that shone unclouded at the moment. The ruffian knelt

down to read the oracle spoken by chance; the coin had replied to the question put, and Bacchus had won the day over Fortune.

"All right, I 'll get drunk," said Lampourde, popping the doubloon, after having wiped off the mud, into his huge purse, which was deep as the abyss, being intended to contain many things.

Striding along, he walked in the direction of the Crown and Radish tavern, the sanctuary where he was accustomed to pour out libations to the god of wine. The advantage of the Crown and Radish, so far as Lampourde was concerned, lay in its being close to his lodging, which he could make with a few zig-zags after he had filled himself full of wine from his throat to the sole of his feet.

It was the foulest hole imaginable. Squat pillars, plastered over with a sanguineous and vinous red, supported the enormous beam that served as a frieze, the rough spots in which indicated remains of old carvings half effaced by time. On looking very carefully there might be made out a scroll-work of vine stems and leaves, through which monkeys catching hold of foxes by the tail were skylarking. On the keystone of the door was carved a huge radish, with

green leaves, painted in natural colours, and topped by a golden crown, the whole thing much faded, and having for many generations of topers served as the sign of, and given its name to, the tavern.

The bays formed by the spaces between the pillars were closed just then by shutters heavily protected with iron, and fit to stand a siege. They were not so closely fastened, however, but that there filtered through rays of reddish light and the low murmur of songs and quarrels. The light, streaming over the muddy pavement, produced a quaint effect, of which Lampourde failed to note the picturesqueness, though it made him aware that there was still a numerous company in the Crown and Radish.

Smiting the door with the pommel of his sword, the bravo, by the peculiar rhythm of the blows he struck, was recognised as an habitué of the place, and the door was partially opened to allow him to enter.

The room where the topers sat looked like a cavern. It was low-ceiled, and the main beam, having sunk under the weight of the upper stories, seemed ready to break, though it was strong enough to support a belfry; resembling in this respect the Leaning Tower at Pisa or the Asinelli Tower at Bologna, both of which keep

on leaning over and never falling. The smoke of the pipes and the candles had turned the ceiling as black as the inside of chimneys used to smoke herring, bottargo, and hams. The walls had once been painted red, with a border of vine stems and tendrils, by some Italian painter who had come to France in the train of Catherine de' Medici. The painting on the upper part of the walls was fairly preserved, although much darkened, and now resembling smears of dried blood rather than the brilliant scarlet tint it must have exhibited in its first bloom. Damp, the rubbing of backs, and the dirt from the heads of the customers who were in the habit of leaning against it, had spoiled and destroyed the whole of the lower portion, and the plaster showed filthy, scraped, and bare. Of yore, the tavern had been frequented by a better class of customers, but little by little, as manners improved, the officers and courtesans were followed by gamblers, sharpers, cut-purses, cut-throats, in a word, a clientèle of dangerous scoundrels who had made their mark on the place and had transformed it into a sinister den.

A wooden staircase led to a gallery on which opened the doors of rooms so low that they could only be entered by drawing in one's horns and head like a snail.

This staircase took up the wall opposite the entrance, and under it, in the shadow, were arranged, with a symmetry more pleasing to drunkards than any other sort of decoration, a number of casks of wine, some full, some tapped. In the wide chimney-place blazed faggots of brushwood, the burning ends of which projected on to the floor, though, as the latter was made of old bricks, there was no reason to fear trouble. The reflection of the fire lighted up the tinned top of the counter opposite, where stood the tavern-keeper behind a rampart of pots, pints, bottles, and jugs. The brilliant light, deadening the yellow gleam of the candles that flared in the smoke, cast upon the walls the caricature shadows of the customers, in the shape of extravagant noses, shoe-like chins, great toupees, and other deformations as strange as those in Master Alcofribas Nazier's "Comical Dreams." The rows of black silhouettes, swarming and moving behind the real beings, seemed to mock these and to cleverly parody them. The regular customers of the establishment, seated upon benches, leaned upon tables the wood of which, scored with knives, covered with names cut in, tattooed with burns, was greasy with spilt sauce and stained with wine. The sleeves, however, that wiped across it could

not suffer damage from the filth, and some, indeed, being out at elbows, it was only the flesh of the arm that ran any risk. Kept awake by the noise in the place, two or three hens, feathered sufferers that ought to have been roosting by this time, had made their way into the room and were busy picking up, from between the feet and legs of the topers, the crumbs that fell from the tables.

When Jacquemin Lampourde entered the Crown and Radish, a most tremendous row was going on in the establishment. Ferocious-looking fellows, holding out their empty cups to be refilled, smote the tables with blows fit to kill an ox, that made the tallow dips nearly jump out of the tin holders. Others were shouting, "Drink hearty, and no heel-taps!" as they pledged each other in flowing bumpers. Others, again, accompanied a drinking-song, howled in chorus with voices as much out of tune as those of dogs baying at the moon, by striking their glasses with their knives and rubbing two plates together. Some teased the servant wenches who, engaged in carrying high above the crowd dishes of smoking viands, were unable to protect themselves against these amorous demonstrations, being, besides, more anxious for the safety of the

dishes than that of their own virtue. And some were smoking long Dutch pipes, amusing themselves blowing the smoke through their nostrils.

The crowd was not composed of men only, the fair sex being represented there by some pretty ugly specimens, for vice does at times allow itself to be as plain as virtue. These Phyllises, to whom the first-comer, provided he could furnish the requisite coin, might play the part of Tircis or Tityrus, walked about in couples, stopping by the tables and drinking like pet doves from every one's glass. These frequent libations, added to the heat of the room, made their cheeks crimson under the brick-red of the rouge they had laid on thickly, so that they looked like idols with two coats of paint. Their hair, genuine or false, was frizzed into love-locks plastered upon their foreheads that were shiny with cosmetics, or else, curled with a hot iron, fell in long ringlets upon their freely displayed powdered bosoms, a little azure vein showing here and there through the coating of powder. In their dress they affected a coquettish and mincing bravery. They were decked out in ribbons, feathers, embroideries, galoons, drops, aiguillettes, and bright colours; but it was easy to see that all this luxury, intended for show, was anything

but real, and came from the second-hand shops. The pearls were glass, the jewellery brass, the silk skirts old dresses made over and dyed; but this counterfeit elegance sufficed to dazzle the eyes of the drunkards collected in the den. As for scent, these ladies assuredly did not smell like roses, but stank of musk like polecats, as that was the only scent strong enough to overcome the foul odours in the pot-house, in comparison with which it was sweeter than balm, ambrosia, and benjoin.

Lampourde, long since used to the manners in this establishment, which, for the matter of that, seemed to him quite proper, paid not the least attention to the scene I have just described. Seated in front of a table, his back against the wall, he was gazing lovingly and amorously upon a bottle of Canary wine which a servant had just brought him, — an old and proper bottle, drawn from the select stock reserved for the thorough-paced swillers and drunkards. Although the ruffian had come in alone, two glasses had been placed on the table, his horror of solitary drinking being well-known, and a boon companion being sure to turn up to keep him company. Until this chance fellow-guest should make his appearance, Lampourde occupied himself

with slowly raising to his eyes the slender-stalked glass, in the shape of a bindweed flower, in which sparkled, spangled with a touch of light, the generous golden liquor. Then, having satisfied the sense of sight with the contemplation of the warm burned-topaz colour, he proceeded to satisfy the sense of smell, and imparting to the wine a sort of rotary movement, he breathed in its bouquet with nostrils expanded wide as those of a heraldic dolphin. There remained now but the sense of taste. The papillæ on the palate, having been duly excited, were impregnated with a mouthful of the nectar, which the tongue drove round about the interior of the mouth and at last sent on to the throat with an appreciative smack of the lips. Thus Master Jacquemin Lampourde, with a single glass of wine, delighted three of man's senses, proving thereby that he was a consummate epicurean who knew how to extract the very last drop and quintessence of pleasure from things. Indeed, he was wont to claim that the senses of touch and hearing were also gratified; the former by the shape and smoothness of the clean-cut glass; the latter, by the music, vibration, and perfect harmony that result from the clinking of it with the blade of a knife or the passing of the wetted finger

round its rim. But these are paradoxes, imaginations, and fancies of over subtile refinement, that, because they seek to prove too much, prove nothing but the mistaken ratiocination of the old scoundrel.

The swashbuckler had been thus occupied for some moments when the door of the tavern opened, and an individual entered the establishment. This latest comer was clothed in black from head to foot, the only white about him being his cravat and a mass of linen that puffed out over his stomach between his doublet and his trunks. Remains of bugle quilling endeavoured, but unsuccessfully, to adorn his seedy costume, the cut of which, nevertheless, betrayed traces of former elegance.

The peculiarity of this fellow was that his face was white as if it had been powdered over with flour, while his nose was red as a glowing coal. It was veined with little purple lines that vouched for the assiduity of his worship of the goddess Bottle. The imagination was appalled at the thought of the number of tuns of wine and flasks of brandy that had been necessary to bring that nose to such an intensity of erubescence. His extraordinary visage resembled a cheese with a cherry stuck in it, and nothing would

have been needed to complete the resemblance but two apple seeds in the place of the eyes, and a slit for the wide, thin-lipped mouth. Such was Malartic, the bosom friend, the Pylades, the Euryales, the *fidus Achates* of Jacquemin Lampourde. He was unquestionably not a handsome man, but his moral qualities fully made up for his slight physical deficiencies. Next to Jacquemin, for whom he professed the greatest admiration, he was the most skilful swordsman in Paris; at cards, he turned up the king with a regularity that no one ventured to remark on; he drank straight on end without ever apparently getting tipsy, and although he was not known to patronize any tailor, he had always a larger stock of cloaks than the best fitted-out courtier. In his own way he was quite a scrupulous man, a conscientious blackguard, capable of giving his life in fighting for a comrade, and of bearing up, without uttering a sound, under the torture of the strapado, the boot, the rack, and even, most horrible for a toper like him, the water, rather than involve his fellows by a single indiscreet word. He was, in short, a very fine chap in his way, and deservedly enjoyed the esteem of every one in the circles in which he plied his trade.

Malartic walked straight to Lampourde's table,

pulled up a stool, sat down opposite his friend, silently clutched the full glass that appeared to have been poured out ready for him, and swallowed the contents at a draught. He drank in a different way from Jacquemin, but quite as efficaciously, as was proved by the cardinal purple of his nose. At the end of a sitting the two friends had an equal number of bottles chalked up against them on the tavern-keeper's slate, and kindly Father Bacchus, astride on his barrel, smiled impartially upon them as upon two devotees who, if they did follow different rituals, were at least equally fervent. The one galloped through his mass, the other spun it out, but in either case, mass was said, without fail.

Lampourde, who was familiar with his friend's habits, filled up his glass several times running; this performance involved sending for a second bottle, soon drained like the first, and followed by a third that lasted longer and gave out more reluctantly. Then, by way of taking breath, the pair of ruffians called for pipes, and set about sending up to the ceiling, through the pall of smoke above their heads, great rings like those children draw at the top of the chimneys of the houses they scribble on their text-books and their

copy-books. After they had inhaled and exhaled a certain number of puffs, they disappeared, like the gods of Homer and Vergil, in a cloud from out of which Malartic's nose alone glowed like a red meteor.

Shrouded in the vapour, the two companions entered upon a conversation which it would have been bad for them to have the Captain of the watch overhear; fortunately the Crown and Radish, was a safe place, into which never a spy ventured, and where an officer of the law who might have been bold enough to enter, would have been dropped through the cellar trap-door, whence he would have come up in the condition of hashed meat.

"How is business?" asked Lampourde of Malartic in the tone of a dealer inquiring what the price current is. "This is the dead season; the King is staying at Saint Germain, and the court has followed him there. It hurts trade, that sort of thing; for there is no one left in Paris but townsmen and people worth little or nothing."

"Don't mention it," answered Malartic. "It is a perfect shame. Why, the other night I stopped a well-looking fellow on the Pont-Neuf and called upon him for his purse or his life. He chucked me his purse,

that had only three or four silver coins in it, and his cloak, which was of serge with imitation braid. I was defrauded. All you meet in gambling hells now are lackeys, lawyers, clerks, or precocious lads who have stolen a few pistoles from their father's drawers to tempt fortune with. You have n't shuffled twice or cast the dice thrice before they are cleaned out. It is positively indecent to have to display one's talents for such poor results. The Lucindas, Dorimènes, and Cidalises who are usually so kind to fellows of our breed, now refuse to settle notes of hand and promissory notes, even though I thrash them soundly, on the ground that the Court is away and consequently they receive no presents and are not entertained, this compelling them to pawn their things in order to live. But for a jealous old cuckold who has hired me to thrash his wife's lovers, I should not have made enough this month to avoid drinking water, a necessity to which nothing shall drive me; death in my boots being in my opinion a hundred times preferable. I have not had a single order for an ambush, for an abduction, for a murder even. These be dreadful times of a truth! Hatred is dying out, grudges are going to the devil, the feeling of vengeance is vanishing, and people forget insults as readily

as they do kindness. The age is sinking into a humdrum condition, losing its vitality, and manners are becoming disgustingly peaceable."

"Yes, the good old days are over and done with," sighed Jacquemin Lampourde. "Formerly some great lord would have taken us into his service, and we should have helped him in his expeditions and secret jobs; but now a man has to work for the general public. All the same there are a few good things going yet."

And as he spoke, he rattled the gold coins in his pocket. The melodious sound made Malartic's eyes flash, but his glance speedily softened, for his comrade's money was a sacred thing. He merely sighed in a way that meant, "You are a lucky fellow."

"I expect," said Lampourde, "to be in a position ere long to find some work for you; seeing that you are no slouch and waste no time in rolling up your sleeves when it is a question of pinking a man or shooting him down. Being a methodical party, you carry out your orders within the stipulated time, and assume all risks as regards the police. I am surprised that Fortune on her glass globe has not ere now alighted at your gate, though it is true that the vixen, with a woman's char-

acteristic bad taste, showers her favours upon a lot of popinjays and good-for-nothings to the detriment of men of merit. Well, until the goddess takes a fancy to you, let us pass the time in drinking, *papaliter*, even unto the swelling of the cork of our soles."

This philosophical proposal was too unmistakably sound for Jacquemin's comrade to make the least objection to it. The two ruffians refilled their pipes and their glasses, and sprawled on the table in the attitude of people who are settling down comfortably and do not intend to be disturbed.

Nevertheless they were disturbed, for in one corner of the room broke out the sound of voices from a group surrounding two men, who were engaged in settling the terms of a wager, resulting from the inability of the one to believe a fact stated by the other, unless he saw the thing with his own eyes.

The group broke up, and Malartic and Lampourde, whose attention had been excited, saw a man of medium stature, but singularly alert and vigorous, dark as a Spanish Moor, a handkerchief tied round his head, dressed in a maroon coat with hood, beneath which could be seen a buff jerkin and brown breeches adorned with a row of brass buttons in the form of bells, down

the outer seam. A broad red woollen sash was bound round his loins, and he had just drawn from it a Valencia navaja, which, when he had opened it, proved to be as long as a sabre. He pushed up the ring, tried the point with the finger, and appeared to be satisfied with the result, for he said to his opponent, "I am ready."

Then he called out in a guttural tone a strange name, yet unheard by the frequenters of the Crown and Radish, but that has already figured more than once in these pages, — "Chiquita!"

On the call being repeated, a thin, wan-faced girl, asleep in a dark corner, threw off the cape in which she had carefully wrapped herself up, and which made her look like a bundle of rags, drew near Agostino, for it was he, and fixing upon him her great flashing eyes, made brighter by the dark rings around them, said in a rich, deep voice that contrasted with her frail appearance:

"What do you want with me, master? I am ready to do your bidding here as on the moors, for you are brave, and your navaja is scored with many a red line."

Chiquita spoke these words in the Escuara tongue, or Basque dialect, which is as unintelligible to Frenchmen as High German, Hebrew, or Chinese.

Agostino took Chiquita by the hand, and placed her

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The child, accustomed to the performance, exhibited neither terror nor surprise

standing against the door, telling her to remain perfectly quiet. The child, accustomed to the performance, exhibited neither terror nor surprise. She stood still, her arms hanging limp, and looking in front of her with the utmost serenity, while Agostino, at the other end of the room, one foot forward, the other drawn back, was balancing the long knife, the handle of which rested on his fore-arm.

A double line of spectators formed a lane from Agostino to Chiquita, and such of the ruffians as happened to be pot-bellied drew in their corporations and held their breath, for fear of being over the line, while the long-nosed fellows prudently pulled back to avoid having their proboscides sliced off on the fly.

Suddenly Agostino's arm shot out like a spring, the fearful weapon flashed by like lightning and buried itself in the door exactly above Chiquita's head, without cutting off a single hair, but so close to the top of her head that it seemed put there to allow her height to be measured.

As the navaja whistled past, not one of the spectators could help looking down, but the thick eyelashes of the girl had not even moved. The bandit's skill was received with outspoken admiration by the critical

audience; even the adversary who had disbelieved in the possibility of the feat, clapped his hands with enthusiasm.

Agostino pulled out the knife, which was still quivering, returned to his place, and next drove the blade between the arm and the body of the impassible Chiquita. Had the steel swerved but a fraction of an inch, it would have pierced the child's heart. Agostino repeated the feat, taking the other side of the body, although the gallery cried out that that was enough, merely to show that his success was not due to luck.

Chiquita, proud of the applause, which was meant for her courage fully as much as for Agostino's dexterity, cast around her a glance of triumph. Her swelling nostrils drew in the air hard, and her teeth gleamed white and fierce between her parted lips. The gleam of her teeth and the phosphorescent flash of her eyes made three luminous points that illumined her dark face, tanned by the open air. Her unkempt hair curled round her forehead and cheeks in long black ringlets, scarcely held in by a red ribbon which the rebellious locks overflowed and concealed here and there. On her neck, more tawny than Cordova leather, shimmered like drops of milk the pearl neck-

lace given her by Isabella. Her dress was different, though scarcely better. She no longer wore the canary yellow skirt with the embroidered parrot that would have made her look passing strange and peculiar in Paris. Instead she had a short dark-blue skirt, pleated closely on the hips, and a sort of jacket or vest of coarse black camlet, fastened above the bosom with two or three horn buttons. Her feet, accustomed to tread the flowery, scented heather, were shod with shoes much too large for her, the shopman having been unable to find any small enough in his stock. She appeared to be bothered by this piece of luxury, but she had been compelled to concede so much to the cold Paris mud. She was just as shy as at the inn of the Blue Sun, but it was evident that more ideas were penetrating her shyness, and a touch of the maiden was already discernible in the child. She had seen many things since leaving the moors, and her imagination had been dazzled by them.

She returned to her corner, wrapped herself up in her cape, and went to sleep once more. The loser of the wager paid his five pistoles, the amount of the stakes, to Chiquita's companion, who slipped the coins into his sash, and sat down again at the table in front

of the half-emptied jug which he slowly finished, for, having no place in particular to go to, he preferred to stay in the tavern to shivering under the arch of a bridge or the porch of a convent until day, a late comer at that season of the year, should return. There were several other rascals there in the same quandary, and they were snoring, some on benches, some under them, rolled up in their cloaks. The numerous boots that stuck out all over the floor like the feet of dead men on a battlefield, formed a most comical sight. And it was in truth a battlefield, on which those overcome by Bacchus staggered to some dark corner, where they became abominably sick and shed wine instead of blood, while chaffed by their more robust companions.

"By all that is holy!" said Lampourde to Malartic, "that fellow is no cripple, and I shall bear him in mind so as to find him again when I have a difficult job on hand. That knife hurled from a distance is better, in the case of people difficult to approach, than a pistol shot, which makes fire, smoke, and noise, and seems meant to call up the watch."

"True," replied Malartic, "it is a pretty feat and skilfully performed, but if the man happens to miss, he is left disarmed and looks like a fool. For my part,

what took my fancy in that performance and show of dangerous skill was the little girl's coolness. The little beggar is thin as a lath, but she has a lion heart in her tiny body. Then I like her great coal-black, burning eyes and her quietly wan face. Among those bustards, sheldrakes, geese, and other barn-yard fowls, she looks like a young falcon in a hen-roost. I know something about women, and can tell what the flower will be from the bud; Chiquita, as that tawny fellow calls her, will, in two or three years from now, be a morsel fit for a king."

"Or a thief," quietly remarked Jacquemin Lampourde. "And it may be that fate will reconcile these two extremes by making that *morena*, as the Spaniards say, the mistress of a thief and a prince both. That sort of thing has happened before, and the prince has not always been the favoured lover, so queer and strange are the ways of such women. But let us drop this purposeless discussion and come to serious matters. I may have need, within a short time, of a few stout fellows afraid of nothing to carry out a job I have been offered, but which will not take us as far afield as that which sent the Argonauts in search of the Golden Fleece."

"A rattling fine fleece!" returned Malartic, sticking his nose in his glass, wherein the wine seemed to bubble and seethe at the contact with his incandescent tip.

"It is a pretty complicated and dangerous job," went on the ruffian. "I am directed to put out of the way a certain Captain Fracasse, an actor by trade, who is interfering with the amours of a very great lord. I can manage that part of the business by myself, but I have also to arrange for the abduction of the wench beloved of his lordship and of the actor, and whom her fellows will strive to defend. So let us draw up a list of trusty, unscrupulous friends. What think you of Piquenterre?"

"Excellent," replied Malartic, "but you cannot count on him. He is swinging on Montfaucon, at the end of an iron chain, until such time as his carcass shall be picked clean by the birds, previous to its falling into the gibbet grave, on top of the bones of those of his comrades who have gone before him."

"Now I understand how it is that I have lost sight of him for some time past," put in Lampourde in the coolest manner. "Well, such is life! You have a quiet carouse with a friend in a tavern some night, and

then you each go your way. A week later, when you ask, 'How is so-and-so?' you are told that he has been hanged."

"Alas, yes!" sighed Lampourde's friend, assuming a tragically elegiacal or elegiacally tragic attitude. "As Master de Malherbe says in his consolation to Duperrier:

> "'*He* was of this world, where the saddest fate
> O'ertakes the best of us.'"

"Let us not indulge in lamentations after the manner of women," said the bravo. "Let us display manly and stoical courage, and proceed on our way through life, hat well down and hand on hip, defying the gibbet, which, after all, save as it affects honour, is not much more to be feared than the fire of cannons, stone mortars, culverins, and bombards which soldiers and officers brave, to say nothing of musketry and cold steel. Well, as we cannot have Piquenterre, who must by now be in glory by the side of the repentant thief, let us say Corneboeuf. He is a stout, stocky lad, well-suited to heavy work."

"At this present moment," returned Malartic, "Corneboeuf is travelling along the Moorish coast under the

command of Cadet la Perle. The King honours him so highly that he has had him marked with a fleur-de-lis on his shoulder, so as to be sure of finding him when he wants him. But, on the other hand, Piedgris, Tordgueule, La Rapée, and Bringuenarilles are at liberty and *a la disposicion de usted.*"

"These names will be enough; they are those of brave fellows, and you will put me in communication with them when the time comes. Now let us polish off this bottle and get out. This place is becoming more mephitic than Lake Avernus, over which birds cannot fly without being killed by its evil exhalations. It is reeking with garlic, the smell of dirty feet, the stink of filthy bodies, and cart-grease. The fresh night-air will do us good. By the way, where are you putting up to-night?"

"I have not sent my quartermaster ahead to prepare a lodging for me," replied Malartic, "and consequently my tent has not been pitched anywhere. I might go to the Slug Inn, but I have a bill there as long as my sword, and there is nothing so painful to behold on awaking as the sour face of an old host who declines to allow you to incur additional debt and who insists on being paid, while brandishing a bundle of

promissory notes above his head like Jupiter his thunderbolts. The unexpected appearance of a sheriff's officer would be less unpleasant."

"A mere nervous notion; a weakness easily understood, for every great man is troubled in some similar way," said Lampourde, sententiously. "But since you would rather not put up at the Slug Inn, and as the Moonshine Inn is rather chilly in such winter weather as this, I offer you, in antique fashion, hospitality in my aerial den, and the half of my shutter for a bed."

"I accept with the deepest gratitude," answered Malartic. "O thrice and four times blessed the mortal who owns Lares and Penates, and can invite his bosom friend to share his fireside!"

Jacquemin Lampourde had fulfilled the pledge made to himself after the oracle's answer in favour of the tavern; he was drunk as a piper, but no man could carry his liquor so well as he. He mastered the wine, and it never got the better of him. Nevertheless, when he rose, it seemed to him that his legs were heavy as pigs of lead and were sinking into the floor. With a vigorous kick he lifted up his sluggish feet and resolutely walked to the door, his head in the air and his

body very stiff. Malartic followed him steadily enough, for he could not possibly be drunker than he was. Plunge a sponge into the sea after it has been saturated with water, and it cannot take up another drop. That was exactly the case of Malartic, save that the liquid he was full of was the pure juice of the grape, and not water. The two comrades therefore emerged from the inn without coming to grief, and succeeded in hoisting themselves, although anything but angels, up the Jacob's ladder leading from the street to Lampourde's sky-attic.

As they left the tavern it offered a lamentably ridiculous spectacle. The fire was dying out on the hearth; the candles, which there was nobody to snuff, had tremendous stalks and the wicks supported huge charred mushrooms. Stalactites of tallow ran down from them on the candlesticks, where they solidified as they cooled. The smoke from the pipes, the vapour of the dishes, and the breath of the guests had condensed on the ceiling into a heavy fog; to clean the floor it would have been necessary to flush it with a river, as was done with the Augean stables. The tables were littered with broken pieces of food, carcasses, and hambones that looked as though they had been torn by the

fangs of carrion-eating mastiffs. Here and there a wine-measure, upset in the course of a row, was spilling what wine was left in it, which, falling into the red pool it had already made, resembled the gouts of blood dropping into a basin from a head cut off, while the regular intermittent sound of the falling beat a sort of rhythmic time to the snoring of the drunkards.

The little Moor of the Marché-Neuf struck four o'clock. The tavern-keeper, who had fallen asleep, his head resting on his crossed arms, woke, cast an inquiring glance round the room, and noting that business had slackened, called his assistants and said to them : —

"It is getting late; chuck these rascals, male and female, out with the swill. They are none of them drinking."

The lads seized their brooms, dashed three or four pails of water about, and in less than five minutes, thanks to a copious recourse to kicks and blows, the tavern had emptied its customers into the street.

XIII

A DOUBLE ATTEMPT

THE Duke de Vallombreuse was not the man to neglect his love affairs any more than the gratification of his vengeance. He bore a deadly hatred to Sigognac, while his passion for Isabella had that character of mad fury which is the outcome, in such proud and violent-tempered men, of the feeling that success is impossible. To force the young actress to yield to his lust had now become the one all-engrossing thought in his mind. Spoiled by the easy conquests he had made in the course of his life of gallantry, he could not understand his being repulsed, and constantly, in conversation, out walking, at the theatre and in church, in town as at Court, he would feel sudden surprise and say to himself, " How comes it that she does not love me? "

And for one who did not believe in virtue in women, and still less in actresses, the wonder the Duke expressed was natural enough. He suspected that Isa-

bella's coldness was deliberately assumed in order to get more out of him, for there is nothing that so excites desire as feigned modesty and an air of shy maiden reserve. On the other hand, the contemptuous manner in which she had returned the jewel box placed in her room by dame Leonardo furnished abundant proof that she was not one of those women who hold off in order to sell themselves at a higher price. No costlier gems would have been of any service; for, since Isabella did not even open the caskets, what mattered it whether they contained pearls and diamonds fit for a queen or not? Nor would love letters have touched her more readily, however remarkable the elegance and fire with which the Duke's secretaries might paint his flame, for Isabella did not open letters of that sort. Prose and verse, then, tirades and sonnets would have simply been wasted. Besides, such languorous methods, which might suit slow-going lovers, did not at all fit in with the Duke de Vallombreuse's masterful ways. He sent for dame Leonardo, with whom he had kept secretly in touch, for it is always well to have a spy in the place, even though it be impregnable. Sometimes the garrison relaxes its watchfulness, a postern gate is quickly opened, and the enemy slips in.

Leonardo was shown up the private stair into the Duke's private room, in which he received his most intimate friends and his most faithful retainers only. It was oblong in shape, wainscotted, the pillars fluted and of the Ionic order, and between them oval frames in rich, luxuriant taste carved in the wood, and apparently suspended from the cornice, itself carved in high relief, by ingeniously intricate gilded love-knots and ribbons. These medallions contained mythological figures, Floras, Venuses, Dianas, Graces, nymphs of the chase and of the woods, which were portraits of the young Duke's mistresses, dressed in Greek fashion and showing, the one, her snowy bosom, another her shapely leg, another a pair of dimpled shoulders, another charms more mysterious, and in every case with such subtle artifice that the paintings seemed due to the artist's fancy, instead of being done from nature. The most prudish among these ladies had, nevertheless, posed for these pictures, which were by Simon Vouet, the greatest master of the day. In doing so, they had fancied they were conferring a unique favour upon the Duke, and had not the least suspicion that their portraits were to form part of a collection.

The ceiling, in the shape of a shell, represented

the toilet of Venus. The goddess, having been attired by her nymphs, was looking at herself in a mirror presented to her by a tall Cupid, past the days of pagehood, to whom the artist had given the Duke's features, but it was plain that the Cupid attracted her more than the mirror. Cabinets inlaid with Florentine agates, crammed with love letters, locks of hair, bracelets, rings, and other tokens of forgotten amours; a table of the same material, the top of which, of black marble, was ornamented with bouquets of flowers in bright colours, diapered with butterflies winged with gems; arm-chairs, the legs turned in ebony, upholstered in salmon-coloured brocatelle with large silver pattern; a thick Smyrna carpet, on which sultanas had perchance sat down, and which had been brought from Constantinople by the French ambassador, — made up the rich and voluptuous furniture of this retreat, which Vallombreuse preferred to the State apartment, and which he generally inhabited.

The Duke condescendingly waved his hand to dame Leonardo, and pointed to a stool on which she might sit. Leonardo was an ideal duenna, and her old yellow wax complexion and repulsive ugliness were brought out startlingly by her present fresh and youthful sur-

roundings. Her black costume, with its jet quillings, and her cap with its falling front made her look respectable at the first glance, but the evil smile that played in the down that shadowed the corners of her lips, the hypocritically lecherous glance of her eyes, ringed with brown, and the sordid, servile, and base expression of her face, soon undeceived one, and it was plain she was no dame Pernelle, but a Mistress Macette; one of the breed that wash young girls for the witches' sabbath and ride away on Saturday nights, a broom between their legs.

"Dame Leonardo," said the Duke, breaking the silence, "I have sent for you to consult with you on the best means of seducing that intractable Isabella, for I know you are remarkably expert in affairs of love, having practised them yourself in the days of your youth and continued them in maturity. A duenna who has been a leading lady must know all the ropes."

"Your Grace," answered the old actress with an air of compunction, "does much honour to my feeble lights, and may be certain that I shall zealously serve your Grace in all your Grace orders."

"I have no doubt of that," returned Vallombreuse, carelessly; "but meanwhile my affairs are no farther

advanced. How is it with that rebellious beauty? Is she still as much in love with her Sigognac?"

"Just as much," replied dame Leonardo with a sigh. "Young people are foolish like that at times. Then Isabella does not seem to be a creature of common mould; no temptation has any hold upon her, and had she been in Eden she would have been capable of not listening to the serpent."

"How comes it, then," cried the Duke angrily, "that that accursed Sigognac has managed to win a hearing from one so deaf to the vows of others? Does he possess any philter, amulet, or talisman?"

"None, my lord. He was merely unhappy, and the greatest happiness of tender, romantic, and proud women like Isabella is to console some one. They prefer to give rather than to receive, and pity, its eyes wet with tears, opens the door to love."

"You are talking nonsense. How can the fact that a man is thin, penniless, ragged, out at elbows, and grotesque explain that he should be loved? The ladies of the Court would laugh at such an idea."

"Naturally enough, for it is not a frequent case, and there are very few women afflicted in that way; but your lordship has fallen upon an exception."

"It is enough to drive one mad to think that such a bumpkin should have triumphed where I have failed, and laughs at my disappointment in his mistress' arms."

"Your Grace is spared that much pain, at all events, for Sigognac does not enjoy his love in the way your Grace means. Isabella's virtue is intact; the passion of these model lovers, although of the liveliest, is strictly platonic and is satisfied with a kiss on the hand or on the forehead. That is the reason their attachment lasts; if it were gratified, it would die out of itself."

"Are you quite sure of what you say, dame Leonardo? You can never make me believe that they go on living together in such chaste fashion, when I know what is the free and easy life of the green-room and travel, when they sleep under the same roof, eat at the same table, and are constantly brought together by the requirements of rehearsals and by-play. They would have to be angels!"

"Isabella *is* an angel, and has not the pride that caused Lucifer to fall from heaven. As for Sigognac, he blindly obeys his mistress, and submits to every sacrifice she imposes upon him."

"In that case, what can you do for me?" said

Vallombreuse. "Come, hunt through the secret corners of your resourceful brain for some old irresistible stratagem, assured trick, or complicated machination that shall insure my triumph. You are aware that gold is nothing to me."

And he plunged his hand, whiter than a woman's and as delicate, in a cup chased by Benvenuto Cellini, that stood on a table near him and that was filled with gold pieces.

At the sound of the tempting clinking of the gold, the duenna's owl-like eyes lighted up, making two luminous holes in the tanned leather of her expressionless face. She appeared to reflect deeply and remained silent for a moment.

Vallombreuse impatiently awaited the result of her meditations. At last the old hag spoke: —

"If I cannot hand over to you her heart, I think I can manage to put you in possession of her body. A wax impression of the lock, a false key and a good dose of opiate would do the business."

"I will have none of that!" cried the Duke, who could not repress a gesture of disgust. "I should be ashamed to possess a sleeping woman, an inert body, dead to feeling, a statue without consciousness, will, or

memory, a mistress who on awakening would gaze upon me with amazement as when emerging from a dream, and would at once return to her hatred for me and her love for another. I shall never sink so low as to be merely a nightmare, a libidinous dream forgotten at morning light."

"Your lordship is right; possession is valueless without consent, and I meant we should resort to that expedient merely if all else failed. I like just as little as your Grace such underhand methods, and the potions which belong rather to the poisoner's pharmacopœia. But, seeing that you are handsome as Adonis, the favourite of Venus, superbly dressed, rich, powerful at Court, in the enjoyment of everything that women delight in, why do you not simply pay your court to Isabella?"

"By my soul! old lady, you are right," cried Vallombreuse, casting a satisfied look at a Venetian mirror supported by two carved Cupids poised upon a gilded arrow, in such a manner that the glass could be inclined backwards or forwards to allow the user to see himself in it more comfortably. "It is all very well for Isabella to be cold and virtuous, she is not blind; and nature has not been so unkind to me that my presence

should disgust her. I can at least strike her as a statue or a painting that one cannot help admiring, even though one does not care for it, but the agreeable colour and form of which retain and charm the gaze. Then I shall speak to her words which women cannot resist, with glances that melt the iciest hearts, and the fire of which, I may say it without conceit, has inflamed the coldest and most hyperborean ladies of the Court. Besides, that actress is proud, and the attentions of a duke must of necessity flatter her vanity. I shall back her in her profession, and cabal in her favour. It is past comprehension that she should then bestow a thought upon that Sigognac, of whom I shall manage to get rid."

"Has your Grace any farther commands for me?" said dame Leonardo, who had risen and stood with her hands crossed on her waist in an attitude of respectful attention.

"No," replied Vallombreuse. "You may go. But before doing so, take this," and he held out to her a handful of gold. "It is not your fault that such an extraordinary sample of virtue should happen to have joined Herod's company."

The hag thanked the Duke and withdrew backwards

to the door without tripping on her skirts, thanks to the practice she had had on the stage. Once outside, she turned round stiffly and rapidly disappeared down the dark staircase.

Left alone, Vallombreuse rang for his man to come and dress him.

"Now, Picard," said the Duke, "you must surpass yourself and dress me in irresistible fashion, for I mean to be handsomer than Buckingham trying to win the good graces of Queen Anne of Austria. If I return empty-handed from my beauty hunt, you shall be soundly thrashed, for I have no defect or vice that requires to be concealed by art."

"Your lordship is the handsomest man on earth, and all art can do for your lordship is to set off nature. If your Grace will be pleased to sit down before the mirror and to remain quiet for a few minutes, I shall dress your lordship in such fashion that no woman could find it in her heart to refuse your Grace anything."

So saying, Picard placed his curling irons into a silver cup in which olive stones, dusted over with ashes, burned as gently as a Spanish brasero, and when they were heated just right, which he ascertained by placing

them close to his cheek, he began pressing the ends of the Duke's beautiful black ringlets, that were willing enough to curl gracefully in spirals.

When his Grace de Vallombreuse's hair was dressed, and his slight mustache, like unto the bow of Cupid, had been pointed with a cosmetic scented more deliciously than balsam, the valet, satisfied with his work, drew back a little to contemplate it, like a painter who gazes with half-closed eyes at the finishing touch he has just given to a picture.

"What dress does your lordship desire to wear today? If I might venture upon a suggestion, though your lordship needs no counsel in such matters, I would propose to your Grace to put on the black velvet, slashed and puffed with satin of the same colour, with silk stockings and a plain collar of Ragusa point lace. Brocade, brocaded satin, gold or silver stuffs and jewels might, by their unnecessary glitter, distract the glance which ought to rest solely on your lordship's face, which has never been more irresistibly charming. Black would set off the delicate pallor due to your Grace's wound, and make him even more interesting."

"The rascal has good taste, and is as apt a flatterer as a courtier," said the Duke to himself. "He is right;

black does become me. Besides, Isabella is not the sort of woman to be dazzled by the shimmer of brocades and the sparkle of diamonds. Picard," continued he aloud, "you may put on me the velvet doublet and trunks, and hand me the burnished steel sword. Now tell La Ramée to have the horses put to the carriage, the four bays, and without loss of time. I shall leave in a quarter of an hour."

Picard vanished at once to carry out his master's orders. Vallombreuse, while waiting for the carriage, walked up and down the room, casting a questioning glance, every time he passed in front of it, at the Venetian mirror, which, contrary to the wont of mirrors, returned a flattering reply to each question.

"That minx will have to be devilishly supercilious, overweening, and hard to please if she does not fall desperately and madly in love with me, in spite of her affectation of virtue and her platonic blandishments with Sigognac. Yes, indeed, my beauty, you shall soon figure in one of these oval frames, painted from life in the character of Phœbe, forced, notwithstanding her coldness, to come and kiss Endymion. You shall take your place among these goddesses, who were at first just as prudish, stand-off, and hyrcanean as you are

now, and who are one and all ladies of much higher rank than you will ever be. It will not be long ere I add your conquest to my roll of fame, for know, you little actress, you, that nothing can withstand the will of a Vallombreuse. My motto is *Frango nec frangor.*"

A lackey entered to announce that the carriage was waiting. The distance from the Rue des Tournelles, where the Duke's residence was situated, to the Rue Dauphine was rapidly covered by the four fast-trotting, vigorous Mecklenburg horses, driven as they were by a coachman proud of belonging to a great house, and who would not have yielded the crown of the causeway to a prince of the blood even, and therefore crowded every other equipage to the wall.

Bold and self-confident though the Duke was, he could not, while on his way, repress a slight anxiety which was quite uncommon in him. The uncertainty he felt as to the manner in which he would be received by the proud Isabella made his heart beat faster than usual. He was torn by conflicting feelings, and passed from hatred to love according as he hoped the young actress would favour his vows or feared she might reject them.

When the fine gilded coach, drawn by costly horses

and laden with lackeys in the liveries of Vallombreuse, drove up to the inn in the Rue Dauphine, the gates were opened wide to admit it, and the innkeeper, cap in hand, tumbled, rather than ran, down the steps to meet the splendid visitor and learn his pleasure.

Quickly though the Boniface had rushed up, Vallombreuse, springing from the coach without making use of the step, was already approaching the front steps at a rapid pace, and his knees almost struck the forehead of the innkeeper bowing low before him. The young Duke, in the short, strident tones habitual to him when excited, said: —

"Mlle. Isabella lives here. I wish to see her. Is she in at present? You need not apprise her of my arrival; just send a servant to show me the way to her room."

Boniface had replied to the questions by bobbing his head respectfully, and now added: —

"I trust your lordship will allow me the honour of guiding your lordship myself; a servant is unworthy of so much honour, and even I, though master here, scarcely merit it."

"As you please," replied Vallombreuse with haughty nonchalance. "Only be quick. There are already

heads sticking out of the windows and craning out to look at me as if I were the Grand Turk or the Alborak."

"I shall precede your lordship and show your lordship the way," said the innkeeper, pressing his cap to his heart with his two hands.

Having ascended the stairs, the Duke and his guide entered a long corridor into which opened doors, as in a convent cloister. On reaching Isabella's room, the host stopped and said: —

"Shall I announce your lordship?"

"You may withdraw now," answered Vallombreuse, putting his hand on the door-key. "I shall announce myself."

Isabella, seated near the window in a high chair, dressed in a morning wrapper, her feet nonchalantly stretched out upon a tapestry footstool, was busy studying the part she was to play in the next piece. Her eyes were closed, so as not to see the lines written on her book, and she was repeating, in schoolboy fashion, the eight or ten lines she had read over several times. The light from the window, bringing out the velvety contours of her profile, starred with gold the loose hair that curled on her neck, and gleamed on the transpar-

ent pearliness of her teeth. The reflected light tempered with its silveriness the deep shadow that enveloped her face and dress, producing that magical effect so much sought after by painters, which they call, in their language, chiaroscuro. The girl thus posed made a lovely picture, that needed only to be reproduced by a skilful man to become the treasure and the gem of a gallery.

Supposing that it was a maid who had entered the room to perform her service, Isabella had not opened her eyes, the long lashes of which looked like golden threads as the light fell upon them, and continued in a dreamy somnolence to repeat her rimes mechanically, just as one tells one's beads almost without thinking. Besides, she entertained no fear, for it was broad day, the inn was full of people, she was close to her companions, and she was not aware that Vallombreuse was in Paris. There had been no new attempts against Sigognac's life, and the young actress, timid though she was, had begun to recover confidence. She believed that her coldness had repelled the Duke, of whom she thought as little at that moment as of Prester John or the Emperor of China.

Vallombreuse had advanced to the centre of the

room, treading lightly and holding in his breath in order not to spoil the lovely picture, upon which he gazed with very natural delight. Waiting until Isabella should look up and perceive his presence, he had knelt on one knee, and held in one hand his hat, the plume of which trailed on the floor, while he pressed the other to his heart in an attitude so respectful that it would have satisfied even a queen.

The young actress was beautiful, but Vallombreuse, it must be owned, was not less handsome. The light fell full upon his face, with its perfectly regular features, resembling that of a young Greek god turned duke since the destruction of Olympus. At this moment, the love and admiration that illumined it had driven away the imperiously cruel expression which occasionally marred it. His eyes were blazing; his lips seemed to be luminous; a sort of rosy light came to his cheeks from his heart; his curled and scented hair shimmered blue like the azure play of light upon polished jet, while his white neck, at once delicate and robust, had the tone of marble. Illumined by passion, he shone, he sparkled, and one could well understand that a duke so made should be convinced that no goddess, queen, or actress was capable of resisting him.

Isabella at last turned her head and saw the Duke de Vallombreuse kneeling close by her. Had Perseus thrust in her face the mask of Medusa, set within his shield and grimacing in agony among a wildering of snakes, she would not have been so smitten with stupor. She remained frozen, petrified, her eyes dilated with terror, her lips parted, her throat dry, unable to move or to call out. The pallor of death spread over her features, and cold sweat broke out upon her. She felt herself fainting, but, by a prodigious effort of the will, she recalled her senses in order not to be left helpless in the hands of the audacious man.

"I must inspire you with the most insurmountable horror," said Vallombreuse, remaining in his position and speaking in his softest tones, "since the mere sight of me produces such an effect upon you. An African lion springing from its den, with red, gaping mouth, sharp teeth, and claws protruding would certainly have caused you less terror. I own that my entrance is somewhat sudden and unexpected, but you must blame my love for my incivility. In order to see you I should have braved your anger, and my adoration, even at the risk of offending you, falls at your feet suppliant and timid."

"I beseech you to rise, my lord," said the young actress. "Your attitude does not beseem you. I am merely a poor strolling player, and my poor charms do not merit your allegiance. Forget a passing fancy, and bear elsewhere desires that so many women would gratify only too gladly. Do not make queens, duchesses, and marchionesses jealous on my account."

"What care I for all or any of them," Vallombreuse answered impetuously as he rose. "It is your pride I adore; your coldness is more attractive to me than the favours of others; your modesty has driven my passion to madness, and you must love me or I die! Be not afraid," he added, as he saw Isabella opening the window as if about to throw herself out in the event of his attempting violence; "all I ask is that you will tolerate my presence, that you will permit me to pay you my court and to endeavour to soften your heart, as the most respectful of lovers."

"Spare me such useless attentions," replied Isabella, "and I shall entertain for you, not love, but boundless gratitude."

"You have neither father, husband, nor lover," said Vallombreuse, "to object to my paying you attentions

and seeking to win your love. My homage is not an insult; why then do you repel me? If you will only consent to receive me, you shall lead the most splendid life. The enchantments of fairyland shall pale by the side of the inventions my love shall light upon to please you. You shall walk on the clouds like a goddess; you shall tread on azure and light alone. Every cornucopia shall outpour its treasures at your feet; you will not have time to formulate a wish, for I shall divine it in your eyes and forestall it. The world well lost shall vanish like a dream, and with united flight we shall ascend through the splendour to Olympus, happier, more beautiful and transported than Love and Psyche themselves. Come, Isabella, do not turn away your head; do not remain mute as death; do not drive to despair a love that can accomplish anything save self-renunciation."

"I cannot share that love, of which any other woman would be proud," modestly replied Isabella. "Even did not virtue, which I prize more dearly than life itself, forbid me, I should still decline so dangerous an honour."

"Pray look on me with a kindly eye," went on Vallombreuse, "and the noblest and greatest among women

shall envy you. To any other woman I would say: 'Take what you please of my castles, my lands; pillage my cabinets full of diamonds and pearls; plunge your arms up to the shoulders into my coffers; dress your menials in costumes too splendid for princes; have the horses of your carriages shod with silver; keep up the style of a queen, and dazzle Paris so difficult to amaze.' Such inducements are beneath the notice of so high-souled a woman as you. But the fact that you have overcome and conquered Vallombreuse, that you have him captive at your chariot wheels, that you may call servant and slave one who has never obeyed, and whom no fetters ever retained, such triumph may perchance touch you."

"So great a prisoner would be too illustrious for me," answered Isabella, "and I would not constrain freedom so precious."

So far the Duke de Vallombreuse had restrained himself and though naturally violent had compelled himself to feigned gentleness, but Isabella's firm and respectful resistance was arousing his anger. He felt that her virtue was re-enforced by love for another, and his jealousy increased his wrath. He stepped towards the young girl, who at once put her hand upon the

window-catch. His features were contracted, he was biting his lips, and the wicked look had returned to his face.

"Why do you not tell the truth," said he in a changed voice, "and own that you are madly in love with Sigognac? That is the true explanation of the virtue of which you make such a show. What is there about that fortunate mortal to fascinate you so? Am I not handsomer, nobler, richer than he, and as young, as clever, and as much in love with you?"

"He has at least one quality you lack," returned Isabella. "He respects the woman he loves."

"Because he loves her not enough," answered Vallombreuse, throwing his arms round Isabella, who was already leaning out of the window, and who uttered a faint cry as she felt the audacious man seize upon her.

At that very moment the door opened, and the Tyrant, with many an exaggerated bow and ducking of the head, entered the room and approached Isabella, whom Vallombreuse, maddened at being thus interrupted in his love pursuits, released at once.

"I beg your pardon, Miss," said the Tyrant, casting a threatening glance at the Duke. "I was not aware

that you were in such good company; but you see the hour for rehearsal has sounded from every clock, and every one is ready but you."

As if in proof of this, were to be seen through the open door the Pedant, Leander, Scappino, and Zerbina, who formed a group quite sufficient to reassure the threatened modesty of Isabella. For one moment the Duke thought of charging these people sword in hand and driving them away, but he would merely have caused useless scandal. Even if he had killed or wounded two or three of the actors, he would not have benefited his cause; besides, they were of too low a condition for him to sully his noble hands with their blood. He therefore restrained himself, and bowing with icy coldness to Isabella, who, trembling in every limb, had drawn near her friends, he left the room; but, on reaching the threshold he turned round, waved his hand, and said, "Au revoir, Miss!"—a very simple remark, but, in consequence of the tone in which it was uttered, pregnant with dire threats. Vallombreuse's face, a moment since so handsome, had resumed its expression of fiendish perversity, and Isabella could not repress a shudder, although the presence of the players protected her against any attempt on his

part. She felt the anguish which a dove feels as the hawk circles above it in narrower and ever narrower circles.

Vallombreuse returned to his carriage, accompanied by the innkeeper, who expended much superfluous and annoying civility upon his lordship, and ere long the rumbling of wheels announced that the dangerous visitor had at last gone.

Now, here is the explanation of the help that came so opportunely to Isabella. The arrival of the Duke de Vallombreuse in a gilded coach at the inn in the Rue Dauphine had caused a buzz of excitement and admiration throughout the inn, which soon reached the ears of the Tyrant, busy, like Isabella, studying his lines in his room. Sigognac, who had been detained at the play-house for the purpose of trying on a new costume, being absent, the worthy Herod, aware of the evil intentions of Vallombreuse, had made up his mind to keep a good watch on Isabella, and having put his ear to the keyhole, a pardonable piece of indiscretion, had listened to the conversation so fraught with danger, and prepared to intervene when matters reached a crisis. Thus it was his prudence had saved Isabella from the foul attempts of the hateful and perverse Duke.

A DOUBLE ATTEMPT

The day was destined to be stormy. Lampourde, it will be remembered, had received orders from Mérindol to put Captain Fracasse out of the way. The bravo, therefore, was standing sentry on the esplanade upon which rises the bronze statue of the king, waiting for a chance to attack Sigognac, — the latter, in order to return to the inn, having necessarily to cross the Pont-Neuf. Jacquemin had been at his post for more than an hour, blowing on his fingers so that they might not be stiff when the time for action should come, and stamping around in order to keep his feet warm. The weather was cold, and the sun was setting behind the Pont Rouge, beyond the Tuileries, amid crimson clouds. The twilight was failing rapidly, and the number of passers-by had become small.

At last Sigognac appeared, walking hastily, for he was vaguely anxious about Isabella, and was in a hurry to reach his lodging. In his eagerness he did not observe Lampourde, who caught hold of his cloak and snatched it off with so sharp a pull that the cords broke, and in a twinkling Sigognac found himself wearing his doublet only. Without attempting to rescue his mantle from his assailant's hands, though at first he took the man for an ordinary thief, he flashed out his sword as

quick as lightning and fell on guard. Nor had Lampourde been less swift in drawing. He was pleased with Sigognac's position and said to himself, "We are going to have some fun." The blades met, and after a little preliminary skirmishing, Lampourde tried a lunge that was immediately parried. "A good parry, that," he again remarked to himself. "The young fellow has been well grounded."

Sigognac bound the bravo's blade with his sword and lunged in flanconade, the ruffian parrying by drawing back his body; admiring the while his opponent's thrust, which was perfect and accurate.

"This for you," cried he, and his sword flashed in a circle, but met Sigognac's, for the latter had already resumed his guard.

Watching for an opening, the blades, engaged by the points, twisted round each other, sometimes slowly, sometimes rapidly, with alternate daring and prudence that testified to the skill of the combatants.

"Do you know, sir," said Lampourde, unable to longer restrain his admiration of Sigognac's assured, accurate, and close play, "do you know that your method is superb?"

"It is at your service," returned Sigognac, lunging

home so fiercely that the bravo had to parry with the pommel of his sword with a twist of the wrist as sharp as the release of the spring of a cross-bow.

"A splendid thrust," said the bravo, growing more and more enthusiastic. "A marvellous thrust! By rights I ought to be a dead man; I am distinctly in the wrong. My parry was a scratch one, out of rule, barbarous, and to be tolerated only as a last resort to avoid being spitted. I almost blush at having used it against so fine a swordsman as you are."

All this talk was intermingled with the clashing of the blades, lunges in quarte, in tierce, double feints, cuts over, and disengagements which heightened Lampourde's admiration of Sigognac. There was nothing in the world the bravo cared for in comparison with the science of fencing, and the respect he felt for any one depended on the man's skill with the sword. Sigognac was growing tremendously in his estimation.

"Would it be indiscreet on my part, sir, to inquire who was your teacher? Girolamo, Paraguantes, and Steelsides would be proud of such a pupil as you."

"My only teacher was an old soldier called Peter," replied Sigognac, amused by this strange conversation.

"There, parry that one; it was one of his favourite thrusts," went on the Baron, lunging.

"The devil!" cried Lampourde. "You nearly pinked me; your point went right under my arm. If it had been daylight, you would have run me through, but you are not yet accustomed to night work which calls for a cat's sight. Never mind, it was admirably done; you straightened out well and lunged superbly. Now look out; I am not going to take you unprepared; I am going to try against you my own private secret thrust, the result of my studies, the *nec plus ultra* of my art, my elixir of life. Up to this time that infallible lunge has invariably killed my man. If you succeed in parrying it, I shall teach it to you. It is the only thing I have to leave, and I shall bequeath it to you. Otherwise I should carry away that sublime thrust into the grave with me, for as yet I have met no one capable of using it, save possibly yourself, you wonderful young fellow! But would you not like to take a rest and draw breath for a moment?"

And as he spoke, Lampourde lowered the point of his sword. Sigognac did the same, and shortly afterwards the duel was resumed.

After a few passes, Sigognac, who was up to every

trick in fencing, perceived, by the way Lampourde was feinting, his sword avoiding Sigognac's with dazzling rapidity, that the famous lunge was about to put in an appearance. He was right: the bravo suddenly sank to the ground as if he had fallen on his face, and the Baron saw no opponent in front of him; but a lightning stroke, cutting in with a hiss, flashed so swift towards him that he had just time to parry with a circular half-parade that broke Lampourde's sword clean in two pieces.

"If the other portion of my sword is not sticking in your belly," said Lampourde to Sigognac as he rose to his feet and shook the remnant in his hand, "you are a great man, a hero, a god!"

"It is not," answered Sigognac. "I am unhurt, and if I pleased I could pin you to the wall like a screech-owl, but that would be repugnant to my feelings; and besides, you have greatly entertained me with your queer ways."

"Baron, allow me henceforth to be your admirer, your slave, your dog. I was paid to kill you. I had even received part of the money in advance, and I spent it. Never mind. I shall rob somebody and return it."

Whereupon he picked up Sigognac's cloak, placed it on the Baron's shoulders as an obsequious valet might have done, bowed low to him, and went off.

The Duke de Vallombreuse's two attempts had failed.

XIV

LAMPOURDE'S SCRUPULOUSNESS

IT is easy to imagine the fury of the Duke de Vallombreuse after the check inflicted upon him by the virtuous Isabella, who had herself been succoured in so timely a fashion by the intervention of her friends. When he returned to his residence, white with concentrated rage, his appearance made his people's teeth chatter and a cold sweat of coming trouble break out all over them; for his natural cruelty indulged, when he was thus exasperated, in Nero-like fury against the first unhappy wretch that came to hand. The Duke de Vallombreuse was not an easy man to get along with, even when he was in a good temper, but when he was the opposite, it would have been safer to come suddenly upon a hungry tiger on a narrow bridge thrown across a torrent. On this occasion he slammed behind him every door that opened before him, with a violence that nearly threw them off their hinges and brought the gilding of the ornaments down in flakes.

On reaching his room he cast his beaver to the ground so roughly that the crown flattened out and the feather was broken short off. To relieve himself, he tore open his doublet, regardless of the diamond buttons that rolled over the floor in every direction. The lace of his shirt was soon reduced to the state of lint, so fiercely did he tear at it, and with one kick he sent flying an arm-chair that he stumbled upon in his angry pacing back and forth, for he vented his wrath even on inanimate objects.

"The impudent creature!" he exclaimed as he raged up and down. "I am minded to have her taken up by the police and pitched into a dungeon, whence she should emerge only after having been whipped and had her head shaved, and then be sent to a hospital or to a convent for reformed women. I should have no difficulty in obtaining the necessary warrant; but her constancy would become only more obdurate, and her love for Sigognac would be increased by all the hatred she would bear me. That plan will not work; but what am I to do?"

And on he stormed again through the room like a wild beast in its cage, but unable to tire out his powerless rage.

While he was thus fuming and foaming, paying no attention to the flight of the hours, that keep on with steady pace whether we be joyous or the reverse, night had come on, and Picard, though he had not been called, took it on himself to enter and light the tapers, being anxious that his master should not get gloomier in the dark, which is the source of sombre humours.

And indeed, as if the effect of the lights had been to clear his brain, Vallombreuse, distracted by his passion for Isabella, remembered his hatred of Sigognac.

"By the way; how is it that that accursed sprig of nobility has not yet been done away with?" said he, stopping short in his walk. "I had given strict orders to Mérindol to kill him himself, or to secure the aid of some bravo, cleverer and braver than he, if he could not do the job himself. 'Kill the brute and it can't bite,' is sound sense, in spite of what Vidalinc says. Once Sigognac is gone, Isabella is at my mercy, trembling with terror and freed from a fidelity that has no longer any object. I have no doubt that she is keeping on that fool with the idea of making him marry her, and that is the reason she indulges in that affectation of maidenly modesty and unconquerable virtue, and repels the love of the handsomest of dukes as though

he were a dirty vagrant. Once she is alone, I can master her quickly enough, and in any event I shall have been avenged upon that insolent fellow, who ran me through the arm, and whom I constantly find intervening between me and the fulfilment of my wishes. Come, let me have Mérindol up, and ascertain the condition of things."

Mérindol, summoned by Picard, appeared before the Duke more ghastly than a thief being led to the hanging, his temples bathed in perspiration, his throat dry, and his tongue clogged. It would have been a good thing for him just then to have had a pebble in his mouth, like Demosthenes, the Athenian orator, when he was haranguing the sea, in order to moisten his mouth, to facilitate his delivery, and to loosen his tongue; for the young nobleman's aspect was more threatening than ever was that of the sea or any assembly of the people on the Agora. The poor devil, doing his best to stand up on his shaky legs, that knocked together as though he were drunk, notwithstanding that what he had imbibed since the morning would not have harmed a fly, kept twisting his hat in front of him with the most idiotic look of helplessness. He dared not lift his eyes to those of his master, whose

glance he felt upon him like a douche alternately boiling hot and ice-cold.

"Well, you brute," said Vallombreuse suddenly, "how long are you going to stand there with that hang-dog look of yours, as if you already felt round your neck the hempen cravat which you deserve even more for your cowardice and your blundering than for your misdeeds?"

"I was awaiting your lordship's orders," said Mérindol with a feeble attempt at a smile. "Your Grace is aware that I am devoted to your lordship even to the length of being hanged. I venture upon this joke because of the gracious allusion your lordship has just —"

"That will do," interrupted the Duke. "Did I not order you to rid me of that accursed Sigognac, who is constantly traversing my plans and annoying me? You have not done it, for Isabella's joy and serenity made it quite plain to me that the scoundrel still lives and that I have not been obeyed. Much use it is to have ruffians in one's pay when this is the way they serve you! You ought, without my needing to speak, to divine my wishes by the flash of my eyes or the fluttering of my lids, and to slay quietly whoever offends me.

But you are fit only to gorge yourselves in the kitchen, and you are brave only when chickens have to be killed. If you go on in this way, I shall hand you all back to the executioner who is on the look-out for you, you cowardly scoundrels, you white-livered rogues, you blundering assassins, dregs of the galleys and a reproach to them!"

"I observe with pain that your Grace does injustice to the zeal and, if I may venture to say so, to the talent of your Grace's faithful servants; but that man Sigognac is not the sort of common game that can be hunted down and killed in a few minutes. At our first attempt he was within an ace of cutting me down to the chin, and he would have, had he wielded anything else than a stage sword, blunted and dulled, luckily for me. A second ambush found him on his guard, and so perfectly prepared to defend himself stoutly that my comrades and myself were compelled to slink away without risking a useless combat in which help would have come to him and that would have caused an unpleasant exposure. Now he knows my face, and I could not possibly approach him without his instantly drawing upon me. I have therefore been obliged to have recourse to a friend of mine, a

bravo, and the best swordsman in Paris, who is on the watch for him and will despatch him, under cover of stealing his cloak, on the first opportunity by twilight or at night, without your Grace's name being mentioned in the matter, as would not have failed to be the case had we, who are in your lordship's service, done the trick."

"Not a bad plan," replied Vallombreuse, now somewhat mollified, in a careless tone, "and it is as well that the affair should be disposed of in that way. But can you trust the courage and the skill of the fellow? It will take a brave man to kill Sigognac, who is no coward, as I do not mind owning, though I hate him, since he dared stand up to me."

"Oh!" replied Mérindol, with an accent at once self-satisfied and assured, "Jacquemin Lampourde is a hero — gone wrong. His valour surpasses that of the Achilles of fable and of the Alexanders of history. He is not without reproach, but he is without fear."

Picard, who for a few minutes past had been moving about the room, observing that Vallombreuse was now in a better temper, ventured to inform him that a rather queer-looking character was earnestly seeking to see him on a matter of importance.

"Show the rascal up," said the Duke; "but woe to him if he turns out to have disturbed me for nothing. In that case I shall have him thrashed in such fashion that he will never have a whole skin again."

The valet went out in order to bring up the newcomer, and Mérindol was discreetly withdrawing when the entrance of a peculiar individual rooted him to the floor. He had good reason to feel astonished, for the man brought up to Vallombreuse by Picard was none other than Jacquemin Lampourde in person. His unexpected presence in such a place evidently meant that something strange and unforeseen had occurred. Mérindol was therefore very much troubled when he saw, appearing thus before his master, and without any intermediary, the subordinate agent, the subaltern whose work was to have been done in darkness.

Jacquemin Lampourde himself, however, did not seem in the least abashed. Indeed, when he stepped into the room he had winked at Mérindol in a friendly way, and he now stood a few steps in front of the Duke, his face brilliantly lighted by the flame of the tapers which brought out every detail of his marked features. His forehead, on which the pressure of the beaver had left a red mark, like a cicatrised wound,

showed by the drops of sweat, not yet dry, that the bravo had either walked fast or had been taking some violent exercise. His eyes, of a bluish-gray with metallic gleams, were fixed with such quiet impudence upon the Duke that Mérindol shivered. As for his nose, the shadow of which covered the whole of one cheek, as the shadow of Ætna covers up a great part of Sicily, its fleshy mass broke grotesquely his strange and monstrous profile, gilded on the edges by a bright ray of light in which it shone again. His mustaches, stiffened with some cheap cosmetic, looked like a spit run through his upper lip, while his chin tuft curled up like an inverted comma. The combination made up a most singular face, of the kind that Jacques Callot loved to draw in his own original and striking way.

His costume consisted of a buff jerkin, gray trunks, and a scarlet mantle, from which the gold galloons appeared to have been recently taken off, bands of brighter colour showing on the partially faded stuff. A sword with heavy shell-hilt was suspended from a broad brass-bound belt, drawn tight round the man's small but muscular waist. Mérindol was much exercised over the peculiar fact that Lampourde had in his hand, which with his arm stuck out from under his

cloak like a sconce projecting from a wall, a purse the rounded shape of which indicated that it held a respectable sum of money. The gesture of offering money, instead of taking it, was so utterly foreign to master Jacquemin's moral and physical habits that he performed it with an emphatic, solemn, and stiff awkwardness that was most comical to behold. Then the notion of Jacquemin Lampourde approaching the Duke de Vallombreuse as if he proposed to reward him for some service rendered, was so monstrously beyond all probability that it caused Mérindol to open his eyes at their widest, while his mouth assumed the shape of a saucer, which, according to painters and physiognomists, is the highest expression of the greatest astonishment.

"Well, you scoundrel," said the Duke after taking a good look at the extraordinary figure before him, "is it your intention to bestow alms upon me? And is that why you are sticking that purse under my nose with that long arm of yours which might answer to hang a tavern sign from?"

"To begin with, my lord Duke," answered the bravo, after having imparted to the long lines that marked his cheeks and the corners of his mouth a sort of nervous contraction, "with due deference to your

Highness, I am not called scoundrel, but Jacquemin Lampourde, swordsman. My profession is an honourable one; I have never disgraced myself by manual labour or the practice of any trade or business. Even when at the lowest ebb I have not blown glass, a business which does not involve loss of rank, since it is a perilous one, and the common ruck of men do not much care to face death. I kill for a living, risking my skin and my neck, for I always work alone and warn every man before attacking him, having a horror of treachery and cowardice. Is there anything more manly? Your Grace will therefore be kind enough to withdraw the expression 'scoundrel,' which I can overlook only if it be used in a friendly, joking way. Otherwise it offends too deeply the ticklish delicacy of my self-love."

"Very good, Master Jacquemin Lampourde; it is withdrawn, since you wish it," replied the Duke de Vallombreuse, who, in spite of himself, was amused at the queer formalism of a rascal so nice on the question of language. "Now, be kind enough to explain to me what business brings you here, purse in hand and clinking your cash as a jester his cap and bells or a miser his snappers."

Jacquemin, gratified by the concession made to his sensitiveness, bowed his head, the remainder of his person remaining stiff, and performed with his beaver a number of passes that, in his opinion, combined the soldier's manly freedom with the obsequiousness of the courtier.

"This is the way of it, my lord Duke. I received from Mérindol part payment in advance for the purpose of putting out of the way a certain Sigognac, alias Captain Fracasse. Circumstances over which I had no control have made it impossible for me to execute the order, and as I carry on my profession on honest lines, I have brought back to the owner the money I have failed to earn."

So saying, he placed the purse on a corner of the handsome table inlaid with Florence agates, with a gesture not lacking in dignity.

"I see," said Vallombreuse; "you are another specimen of those braggarts fit only to strut on the boards; men who burst open doors that stand wide open, soldiers of Herod whose valour is displayed against children at the breast, and who take to their heels when their victim shows its teeth; asses covered with a lion skin and whose roar is a bray. Come, own up; Sigognac scared you."

"Jacquemin Lampourde has never been afraid of any man," replied the bravo in a tone that, notwithstanding his eccentric appearance, had much nobility in it; "and I say it without rodomontade or boastfulness after the manner of the Spaniards and the Gascons. Never has any adversary of mine seen my back; I am unknown on that side of me, and I might be, for aught any one knows to the contrary, as humpbacked as Æsop. Those who have seen me at work are aware that I hate easy jobs; I love danger and am as much at home in it as a fish in water. I attacked the Sigognac gentleman *secundum artem*, with one of my best Toledo blades, one of the elder Alonzo de Sahagun's."

"What happened, then," said the young Duke, "in that single combat, in which you appear to have had the worse of it, since you have come here to return your pay?"

"In duels, encounters, and assaults, whether against one or many opponents, I have laid out thirty-seven men who never rose again. I leave out of count those who were more or less dangerously crippled or wounded. But this man Sigognac is as safe behind his defence as if he were in a tower of brass. I made use of every

resource of the art against him: feints, surprises, disengagements, retirings, unusual thrusts, but he had a parry and a riposte for each and every one. And, in addition, such a combination of strength and speed! such boldness joined to such prudence! such perfect coolness! such complete self-control! He is not a man, he is a god with a sword in his hand. At the risk of getting run through I went on enjoying more and more his close, accurate, and superb performance. I had at last an opponent worthy of me; yet, as it was time to bring matters to a conclusion, after having prolonged the fight as much as possible in order to have leisure to admire his splendid method, I took my time and treated him to the Neapolitan's secret thrust which I alone in this world possess, since Girolamo, who bequeathed it to me, is now dead. Besides, there is no one else capable of using it perfectly, and its success depends upon that. I lunged home so clean that Girolamo himself could not have done better. Well, my lord, that devil of a Captain Fracasse, as you call him, parried with astounding velocity and with so strong a reverse parade that he left in my hand merely a stump of my blade, which I kept brandishing like an old woman threatening a boy with a soup ladle. There,

you can see for yourself how my gentleman served my Sahagun."

And Jacquemin Lampourde unsheathed, with a pitiful look, the stump of a rapier bearing the mark of the crowned "S," and made the Duke notice the clean, sharp break.

"Now, it is a prodigious stroke that did that," went on the bravo; "and it might well have been dealt by Roland's Durandal, the Cid's Tisona, or Amadis of Gaul's Hauteclaire. I frankly confess that to kill Captain Fracasse is beyond my powers. Until now there has been but one parry known for that thrust, the worst of all parries, the body parry. Every man who has received that thrust has had an extra buttonhole pinked into his doublet, and his soul has gone out that way. Further, the captain, like all truly brave men, proved merciful. He had me at his mercy, pretty well bewildered and amazed at my failure; he could have spitted me like a garden-warbler, merely by extending his arm, and he refrained; which was exceedingly generous on the part of a gentleman assaulted at dusk, right on the Pont-Neuf. I am indebted to him for my life, and although I do not attach much value to it, nevertheless I am bound to him by gratitude. I shall

undertake nothing further against him; he is sacred, so far as I am concerned. Besides, even if I were skilful enough to get the better of him, I should refrain from wounding or killing so splendid a swordsman, especially as men of his ability are becoming more and more rare in these days of commonplace slashers who hold their swords as if they were broomsticks. Therefore it is that I have come to inform your lordship not to count on me in future. I might have kept the money by way of compensation for the risks and perils I ran, but my conscience revolted at the thought."

"By every devil in hell! take that money back like a flash!" said Vallombreuse in a tone that brooked no refusal, "or I shall have you and it chucked out of the window without the trouble of opening the sash. I never in my life met so conscientious a rascal. You, Mérindol, would never have been capable of so fine an act, which ought to be included in those set as patterns to youth."

Then, seeing that the bravo hesitated, he added: —

"I present you with these pistoles to drink to my health with."

"That, your Grace, I shall most faithfully do," returned Lampourde, "and I trust your lordship

will not object to my gambling with a portion of them."

With these words he stepped towards the table, extended his bony arm, seized the purse with the dexterity of a prestidigitator, and caused it to disappear as if by magic in the depths of his pocket, where it clinked with a metallic sound as it struck a dice-box and a pack of cards. It was plain that this gesture was much more natural to him, so easy was it.

"I withdraw from the business so far as Sigognac is concerned," said Lampourde, "but if your Grace desires it, it will be undertaken by my *alter ego*, the Chevalier Malartic, to whom the most difficult enterprises may be confided, for he is a remarkably clever man. He has the brains to plan and the hand to execute; and besides, I know no one so thoroughly free from prejudice and superstition. I had blocked out, for the purpose of abducting the actress in whom your Grace is interested, a rough plan which he will carry out with the finished and perfect attention to details that is characteristic of him. I can tell you that more than one author whose dramatic combinations win applause on the stage ought to consult Malartic, if he wants to excel in subtlety of plot, invention of strata-

gems, and smooth working of every part. Your lordship could not pick out a better man, and I am really bestowing a prize upon your lordship. Mérindol, who knows him, can bear witness to his remarkable talent. But I must not longer trespass upon your Grace's time. Only, when your lordship has determined to have the business proceeded with, all that will be necessary will be to send a man to chalk up a cross on the left-hand pillar of the Crown and Radish. Malartic will understand, and will come, duly disguised, to Vallombreuse House to receive his final orders and make sure that everything shall work properly."

Having finished his eloquent discourse, master Jacquemin Lampourde performed with his beaver the same evolutions he had gone through when saluting the Duke at the beginning of the conversation, rammed it down upon his head, pulled the brim down over his eyes, and left the room slowly and majestically, very much satisfied with the deportment and eloquence he had exhibited in the presence of so great a nobleman.

His queer figure and equally queer ways, less extraordinary, however, at that time of eccentrics and bravoes than it would have been at any other period, had enter-

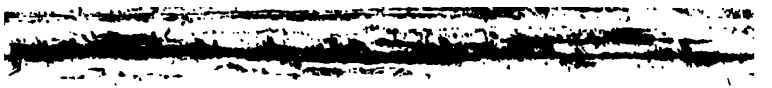
tained and interested the young Duke de Vallombreuse. The orginality of Jacquemin Lampourde's character, a man honest according to his lights, was far from being displeasing to him, and he even forgave him for not having succeeded in killing Sigognac. The Baron must be really invincible, since he had got the better of this professional gladiator, and the shame of having been wounded by him was so far diminished. Then, mad as Vallombreuse was, the thought of procuring the murder of Sigognac now struck him as rather outrageous, not because his conscience was tender or sensitive, but because his enemy was a nobleman; for he would not have scrupled to have caused to be slain and assassinated half a dozen townsmen, if they happened to be in his way; the blood of such rabble having no more value in his eyes than the water flowing from so many fountains. He would have preferred to despatch his rival himself, but for Sigognac's superiority as a swordsman, a superiority which his scarcely healed arm well remembered; so that he dared not risk, even under favourable circumstances, another duel or an armed assault upon him.

His thoughts, therefore, were turned to the abduction of Isabella, a plan that attracted him the more in con-

sequence of the amorous prospect it opened up to his imagination. He did not for a moment doubt that once the young actress was parted from Sigognac and her friends, she would become more humane and would yield to the fascination exercised by so handsome a duke, with whom the greatest ladies at Court were over head and ears in love. Vallombreuse's conceit was incurable, precisely because it was so well founded. It justified all his pretensions, and when he boasted most impertinently he merely spoke the truth. So, in spite of the check recently inflicted upon him by Isabella, the young lord felt that there was neither sense nor reason in her not loving him.

"Just let me have her," he said to himself, "for a few days in some retreat from which she cannot escape, and I shall surely master her. I shall be so tender, so passionate, so persuasive, that she herself will speedily wonder how she could have resisted me so long. I shall see her moved, changing colour, casting down her long lashes at sight of me, and hiding her head on my shoulder when I take her in my arms, to conceal her shame and confusion. Between her kisses she will tell me she always did love me, and that her resistance was meant only to inflame my desires; or else

that it was due to the timidity and fearfulness of a mortal pursued by a god; and such other charming nothings which women know so well, even the most chaste among them, to say on such occasions. But once I have possessed her, soul and body, then indeed I shall avenge myself on her for her former avoidance of me!"



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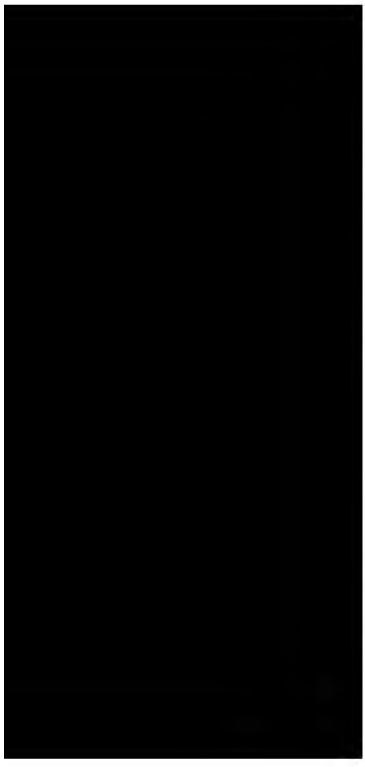
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